# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA: EMPOWERING SETTINGS, EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

BY

SUVARNA VINOD MENON

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Nicole E. Allen, Chair
Professor Emeritus Julian Rappaport
Professor Jennifer C. Greene
Associate Professor Mark Aber
Assistant Professor Joseph Cohen

## ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence affects women globally. Such violence has become a salient concern for women in India, where communities are becoming increasingly aware of the risk of gender-based violence that women face on an everyday basis. A growing body of literature has demonstrated that cultural forces influence women's vulnerability to violence by shaping the acceptability of violence, creating gendered norms that are disempowering for women, and presenting barriers to help-seeking. Indeed, violence against women (VAW) can be conceptualized as a context of disempowerment for women, restricting their agency and mobility. Often, an effective response to VAW is characterized by restoring a woman's agency and power over her life. Further, the response to VAW requires system change and increased coordination across stakeholders from a variety of sectors (e.g. criminal justice, law enforcement, government); and community change that fosters social norms that are supportive of survivors of violence. This study sought to further this body of knowledge by examining VAW within the Indian cultural context with an emphasis on the response to VAW using a case study of a grassroots organization. This agency has an aim of creating a violence-free and gender-just society through social action, capacity building, and advocacy. The organization is a non-profit organization that engages in grassroots programming, networking, and advocacy with other stakeholders like government agencies. Their current work focuses on capacity building initiatives, particularly with rural women; advocacy; and supporting survivors of intimate partner violence or family violence. An empowerment framework is utilized in this study because of its relevance to women's movements and its centrality to the response to VAW (Goodman & Epstein, 2008). The field of community psychology has examined the functioning of organizational contexts as empowering (i.e. empowering its members) and empowered (i.e.

facilitating social change) settings. However, little is known about how empowerment can be characterized in the Indian context, and how the formal response to VAW is aligned with goals of empowerment and the promotion of women's safety and well-being. Specifically, this study had three objectives: a) to examine what characterizes the nature of the organizational response to VAW through a case study of a women's organization in India that works with survivors of domestic violence; in particular, to understand how this is an *empowering setting* for survivors; b) to examine how this setting functions as *empowered setting* fostering institutional change evidenced through efforts to engage in collaborative efforts across other formal systems responders (e.g., law enforcement); and c) to examine how this setting functions within a patriarchal space as an *empowered setting* facilitating community change evidenced through its facilitation of counter narratives of social change. More specifically, the study examined the following questions. Study 1 (Chapter 3) examined what characterizes the agency's current practices with survivors of violence, that is, the organizational process of working with survivors of violence; understanding the mechanisms that facilitate empowerment of women; understanding how the agency navigates cultural tensions that may accompany an empowerment agenda; and finally, examining potential empowerment related outcomes with survivors. Study 2 (Chapter 4) aimed to examine the activities engaged in by the agency related to institutional change processes, understand the aspects of an empowering setting that appear to be salient in promoting institutional change, understand other processes that might facilitate institutional change, and examine the outcomes seen as a result of the agency's efforts. Study 3 (Chapter 5) sought to examine what activities the agency engages in related to shifting community narratives related to the community response to domestic violence, what mechanisms or strategies adopted by the agency are salient for shifting community narratives, and how these mechanisms differ at

the individual versus the community level. These studies occurred within a particular service delivery context and attended to organizational structure, staff perspectives and survivor voices to understand the agency's functioning, while also examining distal cultural forces that may facilitate or impede women's empowerment and social change.

*For Shashikala Menon and Vinod Menon*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the brave and inspiring women who trusted me with their stories and shared their most intimate experiences with me. I am humbled by the resilience and courage that they demonstrated every day and hope I have done justice to their stories and their journeys. I would also like to thank the staff members of the agency for being so warm and accepting of my presence in their setting – you made me feel at home.

I am thankful to my chair, Dr. Nicole Allen, for her support and guidance. I have learned so much from working with her and observing her in her many roles, as an advocate, a community psychologist, a researcher, and a feminist. I would like to thank Dr. Joseph Cohen for adopting me into his lab and being a true mentor to me, both in my clinical and research work. I am so grateful for his thoughtfulness, wisdom and the immense care he shows for his students. Thank you for challenging me and pushing me to become a better researcher. This project would not have been possible without the guidance from Dr. Julian Rappaport, who has always been a role model for me. I entered this field largely due to his work and I am so grateful for his mentorship and feedback during my time at UIUC. To Dr. Mark Aber, thank you for the constant smile, unwavering support and encouragement throughout my years in graduate school. I am grateful to Dr. Jennifer Greene for her thoughtful questions and feedback throughout this project. I have grown so much as a researcher and a community psychologist thanks to this wonderful committee.

I am so grateful to my village – my friends and colleagues who made graduate school an enjoyable experience and who became my family away from home. Angela Walden, Aisha Howard, Faaiza Khan, Ashutosh Dhar, Jon Bystrynski, Michael Kreupke, Mike Niznikewitz, Manasvinee Pramod, Christian Williams, Nate Eckland, Jessie Fitts, Megan Davis, and Ash Bala

– thank you so much for all your love. To my anchors back home: Priyadarshini Patil, Karishma Bhuyan, Sabyasachi Sahu, Shrutika Sabarwal, Payal Chandra and Krutika Bopanna – thank you for your support through the years!

To my newest family, Roxanne and Mike Cumings, and Drew and Cassie Cumings-Peterson, thank you for the love, support, and laughter – I am so proud to have married into a family of feminists, educators, and social justice advocates. It was truly meant to be! I save the best for the last - my three pillars of support. To Ryan Cumings, (now Cumings-Menon), thank you for being such a fierce source of unconditional support, strength and love during my most stressful years in graduate school. I am so glad I found you half-way across the world from home. I am forever indebted to your ability to cheer me up with silly jokes during stressful times, to support me and celebrate with me in happy times, to love me unconditionally, and to accompany me tirelessly in my attempts to scout out new cafes to work at. Shashikala and Vinod Menon, my parents and my eternal rocks – thank you for supporting me in my journey so far away from home, for giving me the courage to follow my dreams, and for providing me with such a strong foundation. I can only fly because I know you will be there to catch me when I fall. This is for you.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Even as individuals are shaped by the community narratives they are given, those very narratives can be reshaped by the people who receive them. It is possible to turn tales of terror to tales of joy, but it is much easier to do this, perhaps even necessary to sustain it, as part of a community, rather than as a lone individual.*

- Julian Rappaport, 2000

## Background: Domestic Violence in India

The rising number of cases of violence against women (VAW) in India being reported to law enforcement agencies and being covered through the media has led to widespread concern about women's risk for different forms of violence in the country. Pooled data from criminal justice records in India, one of the main sources of documented cases of VAW, suggests that the reported cases of crimes against women (including rape and attempted rape, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, and violence perpetrated by one's husband or his relatives) have increased by close to 59% since 2010, and by over 100% during the period 2001-2011 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2014).

Domestic violence, which in India, includes violence perpetrated not just by one's spouse, but also one's in-laws, accounts for the majority of these cases (over 50% of reported cases according to NCRB, 2010), representing a pervasive social problem that affects women across the country. In population-based research studies, the prevalence of domestic violence in India varies from 18% to 70% with variation across states (International Institute for Population Sciences, 2007; Krishnan, 2005). The National Family Health Survey (2007) found that 35% of women reported domestic violence, of whom only a third disclosed the violence to formal

agencies. There is likely to be an under-reporting of cases represented by the National Crime Records Bureau data, suggesting that at least some of the increases over time are likely to indicate increased reporting rather than an increase in the incidence of violence.

Given the widespread prevalence of domestic violence among married women in India, most research efforts have focused on the risk factors associated with domestic violence (e.g., Ackerson, Kawachi, Barbeau, & Subramanian, 2008; Boyle, Georgiades, Cullen, & Racine, 2009). Studies have found that husband's alcohol use (Sabri, Renner, Stockman, Mittal, & Decker, 2014) and controlling behavior (Dalal & Lindqvist, 2012; Sabri et al., 2014) are some factors that predict violence. Martin, Tsui, Maitra, & Marinshaw (1999) identified various stressors that were associated with domestic violence perpetration including husband's low educational level, familial poverty, and having multiple children. Similarly, Krishnan et al. (2010) found that changes in spousal employment status were associated with risk for domestic violence.

The present study is interested in examining key processes in the response to domestic violence in India by attending to the individual, institutional and community levels. First, the study examines the response at the individual level in terms of understanding mechanisms that facilitate the empowerment of women. Second, the study attends to the systems level to examine efforts to engage in institutional change in the response to domestic violence. Finally, the study examines shifting community narratives in the community response to domestic violence.

**Empowerment and Domestic Violence**

Survivors of domestic violence who are victims of control and coercion often experience a loss of agency and power (Stark, 2007). Responding to survivors of domestic violence therefore needs to emphasize choice, agency and empowerment (Kasturiranjan, 2008). Survivor-

centered models that emphasize empowerment of survivors have been adopted by grassroots and advocacy agencies in the U.S. and involve an emphasis on choice and voice (e.g. Davies & Lyon, 2014; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). These models have been associated with a range of positive outcomes for survivors in the U.S. (e.g. Allen et al., 2004; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999).

Empowerment of women is recognized as a goal for grassroots agencies even in the Indian context. Suneetha and Nagaraj (2006) describe three critical phases in the understanding of the domestic violence discourse in India, arguing that these were moments of crucial significance that informed a historical understanding of the conceptual shifts around domestic violence. The authors describe the first phase as the 'dowry' phase during the 1970s, being characterized by concerns about dowry-related violence and its impact on women and families. This was followed by what they called the 'domestic violence' phase of the 1990s, after critics argued that an emphasis on dowry to the exclusion of other forms of violence and power tactics within the marital relationship provided an incomplete picture. The final stage described by the authors begins by the late 1990s, where domestic violence began to be characterized as a development or empowerment-related issue, such that it was an "obstacle in the realization of women's rights, their participation in the economy/market as workers and consumers and their ability to be the managers of the household" (Suneetha & Nagaraj, 2006, p. 4356). This is also seen as being responsible for the shift from seeing domestic violence as a "criminal offense" to perceiving it as a human rights or social issue. The authors argue that this paradigm shift has facilitated the work of non-governmental organizations in strengthening the institutional response to domestic violence and called for the inclusion of informal sources of support in intervention. According to the authors, this has also resulted in a shift in how victims are

perceived, where they were previously seen as an oppressed category, and are now seen as a 'to be empowered category' by grassroots organizations.

Interestingly, studies of women's autonomy and empowerment (defined most often in terms of their access to education and employment) in India are equivocal regarding whether these are risk or protective factors for domestic violence. For example, some studies have demonstrated that women's education (Kimuna et al., 2013; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, & Campbell, 2006; Mogford & Lyons, 2014; Sabri et al., 2014), and their economic security (Jejeebhoy, 1998) is protective against domestic violence. Similarly, other studies have found that women's empowerment (defined as control over resources and their membership in self-help groups or groups associated with financial saving or credit programs) is protective against risk for domestic violence.

Yet, contrary to these findings, some studies have demonstrated that women's empowerment can exacerbate the risk for violence (e.g. Rocca et al., 2009). For example, some studies have found that employment presents a risk for domestic violence (e.g. Chakraborty, Patted, Gan, Islam, and Revankar, 2014) with employed women reporting higher rates of domestic violence than unemployed women. Chakraborty et al. (2014) found that women who were employed were 3.5 times more likely to experience domestic violence. Based on their findings of economic empowerment being associated with risk for domestic violence, Rocca et al. (2009) concluded that women's conformity to social norms may be protective against violence, while defiance of these norms is likely to exacerbate risk. They further argued that in settings where gender inequities are deeply entrenched, enhancing women's social or economic resources may result in increased domestic violence. This scenario suggests that the meaning of indicators of power need to be interpreted within the social context in which they are being

researched. The current study is interested in exploring this paradox at once by studying empowering processes but also interrogating how they emerge in different cultural contexts.

Taken together, these studies highlight the need to understand how empowerment can be conceptualized in the Indian context. Additionally, it is important to understand the ways in which it can be protective (or not) for survivors of violence. The disparate ways in which empowerment has been defined in this cultural context (e.g. as access to education, employment, control over access to resources) also calls for a clearer, unified conceptualization of empowerment. These findings can clarify the utility of empowerment as a goal when working with survivors of violence, and this knowledge can be leveraged by formal response agencies to facilitate the empowerment of survivors and promote their safety.

**Institutional Response to Domestic Violence**

Literature on the formal systems response to domestic violence in India has identified barriers to implementation of an effective response like the limited availability of judges, lack of guidelines and training on the law, vested interests of lawyers, and limited financial resources for women (Bhatia, 2012; Ghosh, 2013; Ghosh & Choudhuri, 2011). In the U.S., various studies have documented the shortcomings of the institutional response to domestic violence like victim-blaming, which reduces women's willingness to engage with these systems (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012). These are also mirrored in women's negative experiences with service delivery systems following violence (e.g. Hester, 2011).

Efforts to introduce systems change in the response to domestic violence in the U.S. involve the growing presence of coordinating councils, which bring together various stakeholders to collectively address this social issue (Allen, 2006). While formal structures such as this do not exist in the Indian context, recent efforts to engage in systems change in the

response to VAW in India suggest that various agencies are attempting to work collaboratively to address the issue of VAW (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). For example, significant efforts are being made to increase collaboration between response systems like law enforcement and grassroots organizations or research institutes as a way to improve services for women and increase the sensitivity in delivering services (e.g. Dave, 2013). Our previous work on the formal systems response to VAW in India suggests that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are at the heart of the institutional change process, providing leverage to further systems change work within the institutional response to VAW (Menon & Allen, 2018). In light of these findings, this study sought to examine a grassroots agency as an exemplar in facilitating institutional change in the response to domestic violence in India, in order to examine what mechanisms facilitate institutional change.

**Community Response to Domestic Violence**

VAW in India may be used as a coercive instrument to uphold or enforce cultural codes of honor (Krishnaraj, 2007). Domestic violence in India is embedded in structures of patriarchy, cultural norms, and a conservative social structure (Biswas, 2017). For example, Biswas (2017) discusses cultural norms and social structures that lead to the subordination of women by preventing them access to employment or educational opportunities, normalizing the violence as a natural method of exerting control, and as a consequence, preventing women from recognizing or labeling their experiences as violence. Violence that occurs within a perceived transgression of gender or cultural norms, like after going out late at night or being seen alone with the opposite gender before marriage, also results in victim blame and lack of empathy for victims. The centrality of cultural norms in understanding VAW in India is seen in its influence on the acceptability of marital violence, where women see it as a routine aspect of marital life

(Srivastava & Murugesan, 2001), and underreport it for this reason (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997). Some research also suggests that the risk of abuse increases when the cause of violence is seen as legitimate by the community (Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, & Jejeebhoy, 2006), illustrating the importance of addressing community norms in the response to domestic violence.

Our previous work on VAW in India similarly suggests that violence exists within a cultural context that allows it to thrive (Menon & Allen, 2018). However, our study also indicated the emerging presence of counter narratives within the community focused on increasing the discourse on gender-based violence and increasing acceptability of disclosure of violence (Menon & Allen, 2018). Efforts to address VAW must therefore be transformative in nature, addressing the needs of individuals affected by violence, but also engaging in social change strategies that change the milieu in which such violence occurs. Recognizing the importance of community norms on influencing the response to domestic violence and women's help-seeking (see Menon & Allen, 2018), this study sought to understand the key mechanisms that promote shifting narratives in the community response to domestic violence, and thus may be salient in promoting social change in the community.

To date, no research studies have explicitly examined the role of NGOs in facilitating the empowerment of women in India, the complexities of taking an empowering approach in the patriarchal Indian context, and the role of these settings in engaging in transformative change at the institutional and community level. Thus, a close examination of an NGO with the explicit goal of women's empowerment and social change may provide an excellent case study to understand how they satisfy this aspect of their mission (as an empowering setting) and the role they play in facilitating needed community and system change (as an empowered setting).

## Present Study

The current study sought to examine the role of a women's organization in empowering survivors of domestic violence and facilitating institutional and community change in the response to domestic violence in India. Previous studies, while attending to community or cultural factors shaping domestic violence, have largely limited themselves to studying the risk for domestic violence. The vast majority of existing studies in this area are based on large scale population-based surveys, specifically, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). While these studies have enhanced our understanding of unique risk factors in the Indian context, they still leave questions unanswered about efforts to respond effectively to violence. Further, very few studies have examined institutional responses to VAW in India. With increasing attention being given to women's safety concerns by the media, growing media and awareness campaigns by grassroots organizations, and increased discourse within the Indian community about gender-based violence, this represents a crucial moment in the social fabric of the community to examine these issues and understand how best to respond to the needs of women within this sociocultural context.

The current document presents three studies. Each inquiry comes from one larger study in which the following was done. Specifically, this study had three objectives: to examine the role of institutional structures in facilitating women's empowerment with a particular focus on a case study of a grassroots effort to respond to domestic violence (Study 1); to examine how the agency facilitates institutional change in the response to domestic violence (Study 2); and to examine how the agency facilitates changes in community narratives regarding domestic violence (Study 3). This study examined a particular service delivery context from the perspective of organizational structure, staff perspectives and survivor voices to understand the

agency's practices and its role in facilitating change for survivors and for the community at large. At the same time, the current study attended to more distal cultural forces that may play a role in facilitating or impeding women's empowerment, their engagement with such services, and how this may affect their lives as they continue to interact with their communities. Each chapter in this document takes up a specific research query within the larger set of data. Given that the method is common to each chapter, the method is presented in chapter 3, but not repeated in chapter 4, 5, and 6.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SETTING

The present study focused on a grassroots organization located in a city in northern India, which has an aim of creating a violence-free and gender-just society through social action, capacity building, and advocacy. More detailed information about the agency like the number of staff, when it was founded, and so on, is not provided in order to maintain confidentiality.

The organization is a non-profit organization that engages in grassroots programming, research on gender-based issues, and networking and advocacy with other stakeholders like government agencies. Their current work focusses on four broad domains: capacity building initiatives, particularly with rural women; advocacy; supporting survivors of intimate partner violence or family violence; and promoting online safety.

The organization runs two domestic violence centers for families experiencing violence. Through these centers, providers offer counseling services, mediation services with family members and/or the perpetrator(s), and advocacy services including assistance with obtaining community resources, and providing vocational skills training to survivors. Additionally, the organization facilitates local community meetings and women's support groups aimed at generating awareness about women's legal rights, the laws in place to protect them, and providing emotional support to survivors of violence. Through their engagement with the agency, women and their partners (along with other community members) have the opportunity to become part of the Women's Leadership Group (name changed), the Men's Leadership Group (name changed) or the Youth Leadership Group (name changed). These are local community leadership and action groups, largely comprised of members who have engaged with the agency and received assistance, before taking on the role of a community leader. Members of these

groups conduct regular meetings to discuss community problems and address the problem of gender-based violence in their community through awareness raising exercises and workshops.

The organization explicitly states women's empowerment as being one of their central goals. The organization adopts a bottoms-up approach in empowering women and encourages their participation as stakeholders in processes of change. In addition to women's empowerment, the organization also works with multiple stakeholders, providers and agencies to engage them in gender-sensitization trainings and engages in extensive advocacy and policy-influencing efforts. The organization's mission statement states, "(Organization) firmly believes that all people should bear equal rights, privileges and opportunities. We believe that women can be catalysts for and agents of social change, and that change itself is a gradual process. And we recognize that restructuring gender relations requires participation from all actors: women and men, young and old, grassroots to national levels, private and public institutions alike". This setting therefore situates itself as both an empowering setting for survivors and an empowered setting striving for community and institutional change, making it an ideal site for this study.

# CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study was guided by a framework that drew on both constructivist-interpretivist (i.e., acknowledging multiple, equally valid realities that are socially constructed); and critical-ideological paradigms (acknowledging that participants' realities reflect and cannot be separated from, the influence of social, political, and historical power imbalances). The study was conducted following approval by the University institutional review board (IRB) and data were collected over a period of two months in the field. Our study questions and methods were formulated in consultation with the organization.

## Setting

This study was set in a grassroots organization in a city in northern India that identifies its mission as creating a violence-free and gender-just society through social action, capacity building, and advocacy. Of relevance to Study 1, in 2015, the agency had started five domestic violence centers in the city to support women experiencing domestic violence. At the time of the study, the agency had two functioning centers. The centers accept new walk-in clients, telephone referrals, and online referrals. Through these centers, staff members offer counseling services, mediation services with family members and/or the perpetrator(s), and advocacy services including assistance with obtaining community resources and providing vocational skills training to survivors. Additionally, the organization facilitates local community meetings and women's support groups aimed at generating awareness about women's legal rights and the laws in place to protect them and providing emotional support to survivors of violence. The organization explicitly states women's empowerment as being one of their central goals, making it an ideal setting for Study 1.

With relevance to Study 2, the agency engages in stakeholder collaborations through gender sensitization trainings with police, paramedics, and corporate organizations. Additionally, the agency conducts regular interface meetings involving important stakeholders where key issues related to the response to VAW are presented and concerns are discussed and addressed in a public forum. As one of the key agencies in the country engaging in collaborative efforts, this was an ideal setting for the study questions central to Study 2.

With respect to the questions pertaining to Study 3, the organization facilitates local community meetings and women's support groups aimed at generating awareness about women's legal rights. Given this setting's efforts to engage in community awareness and capacity building activities, this was an ideal setting for this study.

**Researcher Positionality and Engagement in the Field**

It was important for me to take on a reflexive role as a researcher while conducting this study, and to engage with my own philosophical assumptions, values and personal histories. I was born and raised in India, and spent 10 years living in New Delhi, before moving to the United States for my graduate studies. Thus, it was important for me as a researcher to locate myself in the research and be reflexive about how my positionality plays a role in my work. My interest in studying violence against women stems largely from my own experiences of growing up in India and witnessing violence of varying degrees around me. As an Indian woman, I am aware of and have experienced concerns of safety, hesitation to use public transport and lack of agency in specific spaces and settings. These experiences have made me invested in studying the problem and exposing its complex, multilayered dimensions. I am deeply committed to adding to a literature around the issue of violence against women while creating a space for women to

voice their stories and concerns in a culture where they have, for the most part, been silenced and oppressed.

In terms of my positionality, it was important that I was aware of the multiple identities that I could take on in the field - for example, that of a woman, an Indian, a researcher and a student now living in the United States. As a woman, it may be easier for me to identify with the struggles of my female participants, and, likewise, they may find it easier to trust me, given my identity. This is especially true for a country like India where many women are socialized into being subservient to men and may not speak out as openly about issues like violence if they were being interviewed by a male interviewer. A related struggle is how my identities may make me an insider or outsider. For example, in some cases, my identity as an Indian woman may have helped facilitate trust and rapport building with participants. In addition, my position as an "insider" also forced me to be cautious and examine my own views and experiences to be conscious of how these may affect the research I engaged in. It was important that I be sensitive to diversity and individual differences and not assume that participants will have a shared cultural understanding with me. In addition, my position as a researcher studying in the United States may not have led to me being seen as an insider within the community. These were dynamics that I needed to be aware of and navigate ethically and with sensitivity towards research participants in a way that promoted their best interests.

Another important consideration for me in this research was being aware of how my own values may come into conflict with my work. For example, one of the challenges I considered was with problem definition or the cultural normalization of violence. While my own research background and my values make me believe that violence against women is a social issue that needs to be addressed, I also come from a culture where violence, in many forms, is prevalent

and normalized in women's lives. For example, women are taught to accept street sexual harassment as inevitable and unavoidable, and many women feel intimate-partner violence is justified behavior on part of the husband or partner. Although this is a stark contradiction against my own way of thinking about the issue, it was important for me to stay true to my feminist epistemology and create a space for the voices of women, rather than imposing my own views or values on them or inadvertently providing an additional layer of silencing by disagreeing with or invalidating their lived experiences. It was also crucial for me to understand the cultural context that shapes women's experiences, which includes socialization processes that included deeply entrenched gender norms and patriarchal systems that condone such violence. Given that much of feminist qualitative research depends on the connection between the participant and the interviewer, it was important for an empathic understanding to be a crucial component of the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Hence, even as I treat the voices of women as legitimate sources of knowledge, it is important that I validate these voices and their experiences and believe that these women are the best advocates for themselves.

**Data Sources**

This study drew on data from multiple sources in order to answer our study questions. Specifically, data sources included interviews, observations, and archival data obtained from the agency.

**Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with agency staff members and survivors of violence who were engaged in the setting. Members from the organization provided feedback on the initial interview protocol, and this feedback was incorporated in the final protocol. At the time of the data collection, following rapport building and soliciting participant cooperation, each participant was asked to sign a consent form that informed her/him about the

study and her/his rights as a participant. Participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, that they could skip any question that they felt uncomfortable answering, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Study 1 utilized data from staff and survivor interviews, while Study 2 relied on staff interviews only. A total of 35 interviews were conducted. All data were recorded in the participant's language of preference (English or Hindi) and digitally recorded with the written consent of each participant. The researcher is a native speaker of Hindi, and all interviews in Hindi (n = 23) were transcribed and translated by her and reviewed by a second native speaker for accuracy. The interviews in English (n = 12) were transcribed by research assistants and verified by the researcher. Pseudonyms are used when presenting quotes from participants in order to protect their confidentiality.

***Staff Interviews.*** The sample for staff interviews attempted to be inclusive of all staff members in the agency. However, practical concerns like limited time availability for certain staff members and their travel commitments prevented the researcher from speaking to all staff members. Despite this, an effort was made to be inclusive of all staff member perspectives, and our final sample consisted of over 80% of the staff at the agency (i.e., we were unable to interview 3 staff members due to the barriers mentioned above). In total, 13 staff members with varying levels of experience participated in interviews. Most participants were female (n = 12), which was also largely representative of the gender distribution in the agency. Staff interviews elicited details about their work with survivors of violence. Further, staff members were also asked about their perspectives about the nature of agency, its goals, strengths and drawbacks, and other organizational and cultural factors that affect the organization's work. These interviews also elicited information about the organizational climate as it related to the functioning of the

agency, the goals and activities of the setting in terms of institutional change efforts, efforts to engage in coordinated services, and perceived outcomes or changes associated with their work with different stakeholders. All interviews were conducted in private spaces like the offices of staff members. All interviews were about 45 to 60 minutes long.

***Survivor Interviews.*** A total of 22 female survivors participated in interviews. We attempted to get diverse perspectives from survivors by including women at multiple levels of engagement with the agency. Of the total sample, 12 participants had engaged with the agency in the past and their cases were closed by the agency, 3 women had recently approached the agency for help, and 7 were actively engaged in the agency with their cases being mid-way. Most survivors belonged to under-privileged backgrounds, residing in neighboring shanty towns. The majority of participants did not have an education beyond the $8^{th}$ grade.

Survivor interviews focused on eliciting information about the participants' personal stories, and then funneling down to their experiences with the agency. Specific prompts were used when needed to get information about survivors' help-seeking process with details about their decision-making process, experiences with informal and formal sources of support, expectations for the setting, goals when they approached the setting, and their experiences after engaging with the setting. Survivors were also asked about changes that they had seen in themselves and the community as a result of the agency's work. Most interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes long. All interviews were conducted privately in the counseling room of the domestic violence center.

Despite our efforts to get diverse perspectives, our sample is limited by its bias towards positive outcomes due to limitations of self-selection into our study, which may have resulted in us being unable to get the perspectives from women who were not benefited by this agency.

Despite this drawback, this study can inform an understanding of what processes facilitate successful outcomes for participants. Further, an effort was made to counter-balance this bias by corroborating data from interviews with other data sources like archival data and field observations.

**Observations.** In order to supplement data from interviews, this study also drew on data from observations of the organization's work with women to obtain a rich contextualized understanding of the setting. The researcher functioned as a participant-observer for 2 months, spending an average of 7-8 hours in the setting for 5 days a week during the period of data collection. Observational data focused on the nature of empowering processes implemented by the setting in their work with survivors (Study 1), the nature of coordinated work conducted by staff members (Study 2), and the nature of community engagement conducted by the agency and outcomes observed related to this work (Study 3). Observational data included handwritten notes related to empowering processes and the organizational climate, the organization's work with other agencies, along with open-ended conversations with staff members as needed. An informed consent process was used so that the role of the researcher was explicit to both survivors and staff members. Due to issues of confidentiality, only handwritten notes were used outside of formal interviews. Further, given the sensitive nature of the issue and to protect women's confidentiality, autonomy, and need for privacy, survivors were given the option of requesting that the researcher not observe any interactions involving them or not include their data in the observational notes. However, none of the survivors chose this option. The same option was also provided to staff members; however, it was not chosen by any staff member.

As a part of observations for Study 3, informal interviews were conducted with community members (n = 37) engaged with the agency during three community meetings. These

meetings were recorded with participants' consent. Of the participants in the community meetings, 23 participants were women, and 14 participants were men. One of the meetings was conducted with the youth group (consisting of young men engaged with the agency, n = 10); one was with the women's group (n = 20), and one was a mixed group of community members associated with the agency (n = 7).

**Archival Data.** The researcher was also granted access to the organization's archival data which included detailed case files for clients, annual reports for the agency, and meeting notes for inter-agency meetings and community meetings conducted by the agency. All studies utilized data from the annual reports. Information for all three studies was obtained from 14 annual reports (year 2004-2017) and 21 newsletters (year 2012 – 2017).

Additionally, Study 1 also utilized data from the client case files. A total of 100 case files were reviewed for Study 1. The client case files for Study 1 included information about the clients' background, social support, prior contact with formal agencies, and nature of contact with the present agency. These data were used to further inform data gathered from other data sources. Case files were obtained from both domestic violence centers. These were used to understand women's goals when they approached the agency; prior contacts with formal systems; and the agency's work with women, seen through the progress notes that documented agency contact with each client. Study 2 utilized data from the inter-agency meeting notes which included a random sample of notes from 15 inter-agency meetings. These notes were chosen to corroborate data from other sources. Finally, Study 3 also included data from the community meeting notes. A random sample of notes from 15 community meetings was chosen to corroborate data from other sources.

## Analytic Approach

We used a combination of approaches to analyze our data. First, we used a modified grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze our data and draw up models that emerged from our data. All coding was done by the researcher and a research assistant, in consultation with her supervisor. We began by engaging in an initial coding of the data, creating codes for smaller chunks of data, and staying close to our data. In keeping with Charmaz's (2006) acknowledgment of the role of prior knowledge, often coming from literature reviews, we used some a-priori codes based on a) the empowerment process model (goals, knowledge, skills and resources, and outcomes) for Study 1, and b) Maton's (2008) framework of empowering settings for Study 2, but engaged heavily in coding for emergent codes from the data. Next, we engaged in focused coding, in which the researcher engaged in coding larger segments of data with more conceptual codes to synthesize the data, and organizing initial codes into larger, thematic codes. We also engaged in axial coding to create categories and sub-categories of codes and organize the data into larger, overarching themes to make theoretical connections about the processes or mechanisms that appeared to be important for our study questions.

A constant comparison method was used throughout, comparing data from different individuals, sources of data, categories and sub-categories, and looking for disconfirming evidence in the data. The researcher engaged in peer debriefing with her supervisor throughout the process, who engaged in peer review as an additional check in the analytic process. The researcher's supervisor also sought to identify negative cases or data disconfirming the codes and audited the coding framework to ensure it was applied consistently to the data. For Study 1, in addition to grounded theory, in order to center the experiences and stories of survivors of violence, we used a person-centered process and engaged in a temporal analysis of participant

stories, using visual displays to understand patterns of violence, separation, help-seeking, and outcomes both within and across participants.

Lastly, in order to ensure rigor in our data analytic approach, and to allow for diverse perspectives, we followed several steps as outlined by Creswell and Miller (2000). We used multiple validation strategies like prolonged engagement in the field (for two months); using multiple sources of data to inform our findings (e.g. eliciting interviews from both staff and survivors to ensure diversity in perspectives and using additional observational and archival data); peer review and debriefing as an additional check of the analytic process; negative case analysis; and use of external audits to examine the accuracy of the coding framework applied to the data. Pseudonyms are used when presenting quotes from participants in order to protect their confidentiality.

# CHAPTER 4:

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND EMPOWERING SETTINGS:

# A CASE EXAMINATION OF A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION

A growing concern about women's safety issues in India and an increasing distrust in formal systems highlights the need to systematically examine how systems respond to the needs of victimized women. Few studies have examined the systems response to violence against women (VAW) in India and the extent to which it meets the needs of women it serves. The existing body of literature in this area has identified barriers to implementation of an effective response like long drawn trials, limited availability of judges, lack of guidelines and training on the law, vested interests of lawyers, and limited financial resources for women (Bhatia, 2012; Ghosh, 2013; Ghosh & Choudhuri, 2011). This study aimed to examine the institutional response to VAW using a case study of a grassroots effort to respond to domestic violence (the most prevalent form of gender-based violence in India), as an exemplar of an institutional response to empower women. Specifically, the study had three primary purposes. First, we drew on multi-informant perspectives to examine how the organization facilitates empowerment of women, a central mission of the agency and of the broader feminist movement in India (Suneetha & Nagraj, 2006), and to understand what mechanisms are central to this process. Second, the study sought to understand what empowerment of survivors looks like in this context, by attending to cultural tensions that might emerge between an empowerment agenda and a patriarchal culture and understanding how the agency navigates these tensions. Third, the study examined what perceived outcomes are seen for survivors through the empowerment process adopted by the agency.

**Empowerment and Violence against Women**

Domestic violence is a multi-faceted issue and includes not just physical violence, but also sexual violence, the threat of physical or sexual violence, and psychological or emotional violence (Saltzman et al., 1999). Jones (2002) describes domestic violence as "a process of deliberate intimidation intended to coerce the victim to do the will of the victimizer" (p. 88). Methods of coercive control perpetrated by a woman's spouse (and/or in-laws in the Indian cultural context) may include social isolation, threats, and degradation. Thus, survivors of domestic violence who are victims of chronic control and coercion often experience a subsequent loss of agency and power (Stark, 2007).

There has been a long-standing debate about suitable program outcomes or goals for programs that support domestic violence survivors. For example, while promoting safety (e.g. through safety planning) may be a suitable goal for programs, stopping the abuse from recurring can be an unrealistic expectation for programs. Sullivan (2011), for example, argues that the stopping of abuse is not within the woman's own control or the program's control. Rather, she argues that it calls for accountability from perpetrators of abuse. Further, advocating for the woman to leave the abusive relationship is often unwise because it does not always end the abuse (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee 2000), and conversely often escalates it (McFarlane, Campbell, & Watson, 2002); and it may not always reflect the survivor's own goals. Sullivan and Bybee (1999) argue that the myth that victimized women can simply leave abusive relationships not only ignores the structural barriers that women face when choosing to leave their abusive partners, but also holds a narrow view where leaving is considered the only option, taking away agency from women to decide what is in their best interest.

Given that survivors of domestic violence may experience ongoing isolation, experience a lack of choice and a corrosion of agency and power in their personal lives, re-instilling choice and agency and empowering survivors needs to a crucial part of the response to domestic violence (Kasturiranjan, 2008). Thus, empowerment can be seen as a process that fosters independent control in a situation where it may largely be taken away by the woman's spouse or in-laws. Empowerment can therefore be conceptualized as a more reasonable proximal outcome for agencies to strive for, that may lead to other distal outcomes like safety (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2014).

Indeed, empowerment is often regarded as one of the central goals for community-based agencies and advocacy groups when working with survivors of violence (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2014; Kasturirangan, 2008; Goodman & Epstein, 2008). Cattaneo and Goodman (2014) describe how many programs working with domestic violence survivors use the language of empowerment, reasoning that the term empowerment resonates with social justice values like valuing personal choice and agency, being strengths based, and being focused on overcoming oppression. Similarly, Maton, Seidman, and Aber (2011) argue that empowerment is central to efforts directed at bringing about meaningful social change related to marginalized individuals. Survivor-centered models that emphasize empowerment of survivors have been adopted by grassroots and advocacy agencies in the U.S. and involve an emphasis on choice, voice, and strengths-based approaches (e.g. Davies & Lyon, 2014; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Studies with domestic violence survivors in the U.S. show that a sense of control during the help-seeking process is associated with greater satisfaction with formal supports like police or court systems (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2010), greater help-seeking behavior and disclosures of abuse (Hotaling & Buzawa, 2003), and better mental health outcomes (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2010).

Rather than defining empowerment solely as access to educational or financial resources (as is prevalent in the literature in the Indian context), this study draws on the large body of literature on empowerment within the field of community psychology. The concept of empowerment has received a lot of attention within community psychology and has consequently been defined in different ways (e.g., Rappaport 1987; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2014; Maton, 2008). For example, Rappaport (1987), the first to propose the importance of empowerment for community psychology, defines it as "the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (p. 122). A decade later, Zimmerman (1995, 2000) proposed a multilevel and multidimensional framework of empowerment which involves three components: an emotional or intrapersonal component, referring to self-perceptions of one's competence in achieving goals in the sociopolitical domain; a cognitive or interactional component, referring to the skills and critical understanding necessary for exerting sociopolitical influence, and a behavioral component, referring to the actions taken by the individual to achieve their goals. Similar to this conceptualization, Cattaneo and Goodman (2014) define empowerment as "an iterative process in which a person who lacks power sets a personally meaningful goal oriented toward increasing power, takes action toward that goal, and observes and reflects on the impact of this action, drawing on his or her evolving self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal" (p. 647). The authors' conceptualization of empowerment involves both intrapersonal and social components such that individuals build personal resources and take action by drawing on community resources.

Building on this literature, we conceptualize empowerment as an iterative process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals gain greater control over their lives and environment by setting personal goals, acquiring valued resources, and achieving these goals

with a meaningful personal shift in their experience of power, agency, mastery or critical consciousness. The key pieces of the definitions reviewed here include a) setting personally relevant goals, b) having the knowledge and skills to achieve these goals, and c) engaging in action leading to desirable goal-oriented outcomes.

## Empowering Settings

Importantly, empowerment involves an interaction between the personal and social domains and is enacted in a social context (for example, reaching out to informal and formal sources of support following domestic violence victimization; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2014). In the face of cultural narratives that emphasize silencing of violence and promote non-disclosure, civil society and grassroots organizations can play a crucial role in enabling women to overcome oppression and help them achieve their goals through self-advocacy and systems-level advocacy. Cattaneo and Chapman's (2010) empowerment process model provides a useful heuristic to examine the process through which a setting facilitates empowerment of survivors (i.e., acts as an empowering setting). The key concepts of the model are described below.

**Personally Meaningful Goals.** Various studies have documented that women experiencing violence present with diverse needs and goals (e.g. Allen, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2004). Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) propose that an empowerment approach includes identifying personally meaningful goals, thinking about possible avenues to achieving these goals, and selecting the option that is best suited to the individual survivor. This is often one of the most central steps of a survivor-driven program that recognizes women's unique circumstances and needs (e.g. Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) also argue that one's goals might change during the process since empowerment is a process and setting and redefining goals can take on an iterative approach. Thus, an empowering setting

would help women identify goals that are salient to them (rather than defining goals for them) and would also help women reassess these goals throughout their engagement with the agency.

**Knowledge, Skills and Resources.** The authors define skills as "the concrete capabilities needed to move toward particular goals" and knowledge as the "understanding of what must be done in order to reach goals" (p.88). Knowledge could therefore include knowing what agencies to approach to meet specific needs or knowing how to navigate systems. In their conceptualization of knowledge, the authors also include critical consciousness or "a broader understanding of belief systems and institutions that influence the survivor's situation" (p. 88). Lastly, resources include both informal and formal resources available to the survivor. An empowering setting would facilitate increased knowledge, skills and access to resources for survivors who can then be better situated to achieve their desired goals.

**Impact or Outcome.** Impact and outcomes involve taking action to achieve goals and the outcome of the action taken by the survivor. The authors also include the process of reflecting on one's progress as part of the impact of the empowerment process. In addition to facilitating access to knowledge, skills and resources, an empowering setting would promote action taken by survivors to meet their goals.

Thus, through active participation in an organizational setting like a grassroots agency, women can set personally valued goals and gain the skills to access required resources to meet their needs through their association with the organization. The setting under study could therefore facilitate women's empowerment by assisting at each of the stages described in the empowerment process model. This could be seen as providers help women elicit and define goals, provide women with knowledge, skills, and community resources, and re-evaluate goals as various outcomes are achieved. This model therefore provides a useful heuristic for

conceptualizing an empowering setting and provides a framework for studying how the setting facilitates empowerment of its members.

Despite empowerment being a widely held goal for most domestic violence services, settings may vary in the level to which they function as truly empowering settings (Trickett, 2011). Thus, it is important to examine the ways in which and the extent to which a setting that aims to be empowering for its members fulfils this role. While the nature of empowering settings has been studied for self-help groups, religious organizations and educational programs, fewer studies have examined how these processes operate within domestic violence service settings.

**Empowerment and Culture**

Despite programmatic intentions to empower survivors engaged with the setting, programs may be experienced and perceived differently by survivors. Cultural factors in particular are likely to influence women's personal goals and aspirations when they approach formal agencies for assistance. For example, close to 62% of the women approaching the Special Cells for Women and Children (a branch within the police system) reported wanting to reconcile with their spouses (Dave, 2013), highlighting the importance of maintaining marital relations within the Indian context. The cultural significance of the importance of marriage can also be seen in legal provisions to protect women. For example, the Domestic Violence Act has been criticized for failing to define domestic violence as a human rights issue (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, p. 98). The Act has also been criticized for promoting the patriarchal idea that the woman must "adjust" to her husband and in-laws, thus promoting the importance of marriage (Karat, 2002). These findings highlight how navigating formal systems and engaging in help-seeking while in an abusive relationship may be further complicated by cultural norms that demand subservience or "adjustment" from the survivor.

Thus, an empowering process may require transgressing cultural norms of silencing the violence and recreating a new counter-narrative for women to speak out against their experiences of violence. In addition, the agency's goal of empowering women may come into conflict with women's negotiations of their social relationships and their goals which may involve culturally sanctioned values of maintaining their marital relationships. Therefore, a key piece of this study was interviews with survivors as they engaged with the agency to examine the complexities involved in their decision-making process, the ways in which the agency acts as a facilitator to help them reach their personal goals, and the manner in which the agency negotiated cultural tensions. Such data will be fruitful for the setting to inform future services but can also be used as an exemplar of how empowering settings function in different cultural contexts.

## Present Study

Our study sought to understand how a grassroots agency facilitates the empowerment of survivors of violence. Specifically, the study had the following goals. First, we sought to understand what characterizes the agency's current practices with survivors of violence, that is, the organizational process of working with survivors of violence. Second, we aimed to understand the mechanisms that facilitate empowerment of women. While we generally think of empowerment as gaining control over one's lives as a protective factor, it can also connote risk (e.g. Brodsky et al., 2011). Thus, we attempted to understand how the agency navigates cultural tensions that may accompany an empowerment agenda. Finally, the study sought to examine potential empowerment related outcomes seen with survivors.

## Results

We set up our results to first characterize the sample of women being served by the agency. Next, our results focus on understanding the process followed by the agency in its work

with women, the mechanisms facilitating empowerment of women, the manner in which the agency navigated cultural issues, and the perceived empowerment related outcomes seen with survivors.

**Women Served by Agency**

The clients who were served by the agency were predominantly from under-privileged backgrounds and most of them did not have an education beyond 8th grade. Women who were interviewed reported experiencing violence that included physical abuse ("*My husband used to hit me and beat me. One time my daughter was at 8-months during my pregnancy and he hit me in the stomach*"), sexual abuse ("*Even if I don't like to or don't want to, he would still pressurize me to do sex. If I am tired from work, he would pressure me. Sometimes he would force me – even if I try to push him away, he would pressure me. I used to feel like I am being mentally tortured"*); emotional abuse and control ("*His mother started talking badly to me, wouldn't let me phone my parents - she had locked the phone. When I tried go, the mother would hold her hand like this and would both block my way, and not let me near the phone. They didn't let me talk to anyone - not allowing me to go out of the house, not allowing me to go to my parents – it was like I was imprisoned by them"*); severe neglect of their physical and emotional needs ("*My mother-in-law said surgeries are not a big thing, the doctors are crazy to say that you should take precautions. Do all the housework, wash all of the clothes - everything. There was not a single job that my mother-in-law did not make me do. There was just one or two rotis [bread] that she gave - one in the day and one in the evening"*); and dowry related violence *("My mother in law said that until you bring home a motor cycle, my son will keep harassing you like this. They also said that we had said that two things had to be there at the wedding –a fridge and a*

*motorcycle, whether or not there is anything else"*). Most women reported experiencing harassment from their husbands as well as their in-laws.

Women reported varying levels of support from informal supports like family. While some women reported having support from their parents (*"My mom and dad did not want me to go back to them"*), others reported that even though their parents felt bad about their daughter's situation, and they were able to confide in them, *("Whenever he harassed me each time I used to tell mummy only – whenever he did anything, whatever problem I had I used to tell mummy"*), they expected the daughter to remain with the husband and in-laws *("They told me little fights do happen I should just tolerate it."*). While some women took this as part of the culture they lived in, other women reported resentment about the lack of support, *("If they cared, wouldn't they think, I won't send my daughter over there? Why did they send me there?"*).

Women reported many cultural forces that prevented them from disclosing the violence. This included an acceptance and normalization of violence *("My mom said 'look child you have to bear some things, this is the fate of women, these things happen in all marriages, you have to bear it – it's okay'"*); the importance of honor (*"My in-laws would say 'how long will you keep her there [with parents]– people will laugh at you, your neighbors will ask questions and gossip, so there will be a loss of face for you'", "I had never imagined being humiliated by people like this, the humiliation and loss of face is only mine – they have no such loss of face"*); the role of gender *("Here [with in-laws] I am a woman, so I should be kept pressured"*) and male privilege *("Girls are not considered humans at all – I've been seeing that since childhood – my father gave me life but he never bore any of my expenses, he did it all for my brothers"*); and the cultural importance of marriage *("My father used to say, she's a girl – she may be unhappy but girls are best in their in-laws house – she should stay there", "The parents just feel that she's*

*married now, she has to stay there, they feel the relationship shouldn't get spoilt so they don't talk or interfere"*).

**Organizational Process**

The agency engaged in a cyclical intervention with survivors of violence. First, they engaged in emotional and supportive listening with clients and families during their initial visits. The staff members call this the "counseling" phase of the intervention, and it entails empathic listening as the survivor recounts her story. This is followed by the counselors eliciting the survivor's goals and understanding her expectations from the agency. On understanding the survivors' needs and goals, the counselors proceed to offer the survivor with the different options that she has (these most often included mediation with the husband or in-laws, or legal action). Women are given ample time to consider their options, with ongoing counseling in the meanwhile. In many cases where women are uncertain about proceeding with legal action, counselors attempt to engage in a mediation process with the other party. Archival data from the agency annual reports indicated that since the project began in 2015, 651 cases of domestic violence were registered with the agency. Of these, 272 (41.8%) cases resulted in reconciliation following mediation by the agency. Based on data from the case files, of a total of 100 cases, mediation was attempted in 63 cases, with 34 cases resulting in reunification with the partner.

Based on the review of case files, legal referrals were given to 32% of the cases. In cases where women decide to take legal action, staff members assist women by providing them with advocacy services, engaging in systems-level advocacy with different formal systems, modeling advocacy for survivors, and finally encouraging the survivor to advocate for herself. According to archival data from annual reports, of the total number of registered cases, 242 (37.2%) cases were provided with legal services - such as getting them in touch with lawyers, assisting with

getting police complaints filed, registering their case at the Crime Against Women Cell, or accompanying them to the District Court. Throughout the process, counselors encourage the survivors' independence, discussing employment options for women who are not financially independent, and providing resources to women based on their needs. Our review of case files suggested that 10% of the cases resulted in women seeking employment or educational opportunities in order to become self sufficient. Emphasizing the cyclical nature of this process, counselors are constantly engaging in a re-evaluation of client goals and needs, in order to provide them with appropriate support and resources.

**Mechanisms facilitating empowerment**

The agency facilitates survivor empowerment through various mechanisms of action.

**Survivor voice.** By providing a safe, accepting, and non-judgmental space for clients to disclose the violence experienced by them, the agency provides women with the opportunity to voice her story (often for the first time) and express her needs, recognizing that women are likely to have different needs and goals depending on their individual contexts.

> Our goal is to help her by helping to make her stable by understanding her problem. So we do counseling with her, we listen to her problem, and then we try and understand how to move forward.
>
> - Rita, female, staff member

Another staff member noted that this step is especially important given cultural messages that survivors may have received prior to their engagement with the agency that may deny or undermine the violence they experience,

> So first thing is that she often doesn't get family support, so she thinks that she should get some place where they will listen to me, will understand my problems, because even

> today our society sees it as a small minor domestic dispute or argument which should be settled within the house and the matter should be closed. Even the woman's own relatives start avoiding matters – it shouldn't happen that the matter becomes too big and it's an additional burden on us. So she feels that at least let someone listen to me, understand the pain I have within me, at least try to understand, and see that this is not just a normal common argument, it's not a minor incident, it's an injustice being committed on me and how I can stop it or end it. Should I just keep quiet, or should I take appropriate action against that? And if there is some action to take then what is it, someone tell me. Because normally in most houses no parents tell their daughter very easily that you take legal action against them – they first try and make some adjustment.
>
> - Arti, female, staff member

This was also corroborated through informal conversations with staff members. For example, the following observation notes describe a conversation with the counselor after observing a counseling session with a survivor,

> After the family left, the counselor said to me, "Women are in the dark, they don't know what paths they have – what is available. Even though the paths are there, they don't see it". She stressed the importance of the first meeting since this is many times the first time that they are voicing their stories. She emphasized the importance of letting women speak with minimal interruptions so that they feel heard. She also said it is important to build a connection with them in this first session so that they come back, especially since they often come after multiple negative interactions with other agencies.

The emphasis on making survivors feel heard was also echoed by survivors themselves.

> Ma'am listened to me, she gave me peace of mind – meaning my mind was agitated. I had no peace, I had no internal peace, but when I talked to ma'am, I thought ok something can be done. She gave me courage and she heard me.
>
> - Pooja, female, survivor

**Creating choice.** The agency creates choice for survivors by asking her to elicit her own goals and needs, and then by outlining the different paths that she could take. This emphasis on women's choice was exemplified in the counseling sessions that were observed, where counselors always asked, "*What do you want from us?*", or "*What have you thought about what you want to do?*". One staff member described the importance of this step by stating that women often feel trapped, and it is up to the staff members to show them their options, "*Many times women feel like there is nothing they can do – so we have to show them the path. There are lots of paths, lots of options, which one is right for you?*". Another staff member described this as opening doors for survivors,

> I think one thing is that they know what options they have [after counseling]. Options are given to them, like these are your options, let us know what you want to do - so they have something to think about. A lot of them whose cases have been successes, they come back with a very happy mind and you know they feel like their doors have opened.
>
> - Poonam, female, staff member

Another participant described her process of working with survivors,

> At the start, I share her problem. I ask her what her problem is. Then what she wants. Does she want to live in that house? If she is living there, if she wants to return. If she is comfortable there, is there danger there? If she is comfortable there, we suggest that we talk to her family members. The first thing that you need to do is talk to the woman about

what she wants. Because the biggest problem that she faces there is that no one ever asks her that - so the first thing depends on her, on what she wants.

- Neeta, female, staff member

Thus, just the process of asking women what they want, or how they want to proceed, fosters choice. This was also corroborated by survivors who felt that their engagement with the agency facilitated choices for them. For example, one survivor talked about how cultural pressure against disclosure of violence and normalization of violence prevent women from recognizing that disclosing the violence is a viable option, leading to them feeling trapped in the abusive situation,

> The torture affects us – it affected me, so I know it definitely affects the other ladies, and they should absolutely tell others about this. Many women in this situation commit suicide because they have no other path. So she has to make that decision - without knowing that she can speak out against it. This is a right too, that no one can mentally torture us.

- Samaira, female, survivor

**Knowledge, skills and resources to function independently.** For the agency, an important part of enacting choice and seeing positive outcomes for women involves providing them with knowledge, skills and resources that allow them to make independent choices for their well-being. For most survivors, this knowledge began at the very basic stage of understanding and labeling behaviors as domestic violence, rather than as normative behaviors. For example, Samaira recounted the importance of gaining knowledge about what constitutes domestic violence,

> Many ladies think that they can only go to the police if there is hitting and beating involved. They think that they cannot do anything about the mental torture he is committing, or the sexual coercion - because they think that he is my husband. There are many people who do not even know about this. And they should know about this. There is a certain way of behaving, and they should know that. Before, I did not have that much knowledge either.
>
> - Samaira, female, survivor

A staff member described how lack of awareness, lack of resources, and cultural barriers prevent women from seeking help and disclosing violence,

> First of all - they don't have much knowledge about laws. Second opportunities for leaving the house were few and they felt that if they took the step and other people didn't, they thought it was wrong, they felt ashamed. Then third they felt if I go somewhere, if I go to the police, I don't have any money. And fourth they had the thought in their mind - pressure from their family, parents, that however it is, live your life there itself, keep bearing it.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

She contrasted these beliefs with what the agency tells women, "*But here we tell them that this act has been enacted, no one can throw you out of the house, and this act is there that you can register a complaint against the injustice done to you even staying in the same house you can lodge a complaint against them*". Another staff member's narrative echoes this emphasis on providing clients with knowledge, skills, and resources,

> At our counseling center, she can get help and decide what she wants to do. So for example, we explain depending on what she wants, what legal steps she can take, we

> explain the process. Because many of the women don't know these things – they are not aware - so we explain. Many times, if they need to get legal help, they may not even have money for transport to the place, so we help them with that. Sometimes the situation is so bad that they don't even have money for food – so we help them with that because that is immediate help, then the other steps can be seen. So depending on what she needs, we proceed.
>
> - Poonam, female, staff member

This quote also illustrates how the agency seeks to emphasize choice by removing potential barriers that clients may encounter (like lack of financial resources), so that women can make the optimal decision for their situation. The agency's emphasis on providing survivors with knowledge, which often included legal advocacy, was also corroborated by observational data. The following excerpt includes observation notes from a counseling session with a father and daughter (Janhavi) who had come to the center to complain about dowry-related harassment perpetrated by Janhavi's husband and in-laws, and sexual assault perpetrated by her father-in-law.

> The counsellor explained the importance of proper documentation in legal cases to the family. She expressed, "People will ask when did you go to police? So you need to have these records". The counselor also emphasized the importance of having ample evidence to support the claims being made in the complaint. For example, for dowry requests or purchases related to the wedding, she encouraged the family to produce receipts related to the purchases and suggested other avenues for evidence like photos of the wedding which may contain photos of gift exchanges or of the things that were bought or given to the in-laws during the wedding. The counselor said that the family was likely to get a date at the

> Women's Cell [a division of the police] after 10 days of approaching them. She encouraged the family to call her and ask her if they had any questions before their date. She also explained the process that will be followed at the Women's Cell so that the family would know what to expect when they went there. She explained that the Women's Cell proceedings have three stages, or clients have three options, "The first option, which is the most preferred option for the Women's Cell is mediation where they hear both parties and attempt to patch the couple up. This is always the first step. If this fails, they try to arrive at a mutual understanding with both parties to file a consensual divorce. If this fails as well, the last stage is to file an FIR [First Information Report, which is a formal police complaint]. The Women's Cell considers this the least preferred route". The counselor explained that the sexual assault case will become a criminal case, whereas the dowry case and the divorce will be treated as civil suits. She went on to explain how the family could strengthen the legal document and what language they could use to write a more effective complaint.

Archival data further corroborated these findings. Case files indicated that women were given information about different options, including knowledge about legal steps, during the first couple of meetings, and subsequently connected to resources in the community depending on their needs. In addition, all survivors who were interviewed described the many ways in which their association with the agency had led to increased knowledge, skills or resources. For example, one survivor stated,

> I did not know what maintenance [spousal support] and all meant – I didn't know that these were my rights. In my family, none of this had happened. It only happened with me, so I did not know what it meant. I did not know what I should do. They helped me a lot

by explaining these things and teaching me about the laws and all the steps I could take. Before that I just used to be in a lot of tension [stress].

- Kajal, female, survivor

Women also talked about how this access to knowledge about resources in the community, and about their own rights leads to a sense of confidence in them. One survivor stated,

They were the first to tell me about these things. Like, he can't say these things [referring to emotional abuse]. You can complain about these things [emotional abuse] as well. You can talk about these things. So when you find out that you have these rights, your confidence increases because you find out that you can complain about the injustice against you.

- Rupa, female, survivor

Yet another survivor described the staff member and the agency as showing her the way forward,

Whoever showed me the way, it was the lady from the organization. She told me everything, about the Crime against Women Cell, how to go there, what to do, how to complain, she told me all this. She is the one who told me, to write like this, and then I wrote it. I did not understand what to write, and then she told me. I was under such tension [stress] before I met them.

- Juhi, female, survivor

**Acknowledging expertise and emphasizing agency.** Following supportive and emotional listening and providing women with knowledge about the different routes that they could take, staff members acknowledge women's expertise in their own lives by eliciting their

goals and proceeding in a survivor-centered manner. A staff member described this process in the following way,

> Our emphasis is on making her decide. She's not just an individual – this is a marriage, she's emotionally attached. So we have to understand her perspective, where is she coming from, what does she need, and then help her with that depending on what she wants. If it is important for her to access legal aid for legal needs, then we have to show her that this is the process, this is what will happen. For many women this is the first time that they are telling someone, so they don't know what to do or what can be done. So it is important for us to teach her the laws, tell her what her rights are. If she wants to make a compromise or mediate with her in-laws or husband, that is okay too, but she should still know what her rights are and what the law is, so that then she can make a decision after knowing.
>
> - Priti, female, staff member

The agency's emphasis on survivor-driven programming is illustrated by the following staff member,

> Our main job is listening to her, making sure we understand her problem, helping her understand what she can do. We don't pressurize – so whatever she wants to do, she can do and we help her. We show her these are your options, and then she selects.
>
> - Priya, female, staff member

This was also corroborated with observations. For example, in Janhavi's case, after providing the family with information about the legal process, the observation notes state,

> The counselor then asked the client what she wanted and how she wanted to proceed after hearing about the laws and how the process at the Women's Cell will unfold. The client

responded, “We have tried to make them understand, and we have seen that they don’t. So now we want our money back and he should get arrested”.

The agency therefore acknowledges that each woman that they see has unique circumstances and needs and is the expert of her own life. They proceed in a survivor-centered way to tailor their intervention to her needs and wishes rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

> I think patience is really the key. Because you know you might think I am doing so much sensitization, and I have this vast knowledge in the area, and you know you want to help people, giving them a feminist point of view. So you may think this is what you should be doing as a woman, and this is your role; but that’s where you have to put a stop and that’s the tough part – you stop, and you have to ask them what they want. It is ultimately their life and what they want, and they know best.
>
> - Apoorva, female, staff member

**Creating spaciousness for decision making.** By acknowledging that women’s needs are multifaceted, and their decision making often involves navigating complex relationships, personal needs, and cultural norms, the agency creates spaciousness for women by offering them time to consider their alternatives. Staff members also recognize that women’s needs and goals change over time, and that often by considering all alternatives, women may wish to take a different route than what she initially thought when she first approached the agency, as is seen in the following staff member’s words,

> Many times they feel - my husband beats me, he’s beaten me so I’ll pick him up and put him in jail. But the same thing after two hours if she’s telling us – no if he gets locked up then how will my house run? So there – meaning the woman feels that my house should

also run, he should also stay with me, but there should be a change in him. The main thing is that his – the manner in which he's living – there should be some change in that system. That somewhere in my house I also have some preference, I am his wife, I am the mother of his children, I also have some rights in this house, that I can do something according to my wishes, I am also a human, if somewhere I have some problem or am unhappy someone should ask about me, someone does something for me too – those things come out slowly.

- Neeta, female, staff member

This attention to women's changing needs given changing circumstances is also illustrated in the following participant's words,

If she says she wants to patch up, which is the case for a lot of cases, then we have to see who is involved – so is it just the husband, is it the in-laws also, who all are there. Depending on who all are involved then, we call them to the center and we do mediation with both the parties. We also want to make sure that there is documentation of all these meetings. So even if she wants to go back to her *sasural* [marital home] and husband, we document everything. So when she first comes in, she writes a complaint that we file in our case file. Then even when they come for mediation, we document that this happened. So that this way, if in the future she decides to take legal action, she has documentation and can say, yes, I tried to get help before also.

- Tina, female, staff member

Part of this process also involves recognizing the cyclical nature of the process and re-evaluating women's goals.

**Acknowledging systemic flaws and promoting self-advocacy.** By engaging in extensive systems advocacy efforts, the agency helps communicate to clients that formal systems have their own limitations, and that systems often fail to meet the needs of women; emphasizing systems responsiveness, rather than identifying deficits in the individuals seeking help. Staff members expressed a strong belief in the importance of the parallel emphasis on survivor knowledge and independence, and systems responsiveness to meet women's needs ("*It's important for women to know what their rights are and how she can take things up legally if she has to – but police and courts also have to do their part*"). This was further corroborated by observational data. For example, with the case observation with survivor, Janhavi, the following notes describe the staff member's efforts to inform the family about systemic flaws, while encouraging the survivor's self-advocacy,

> The counselor warned the family that lawyers often charge separately for each complaint to exploit families and make money. However, the Domestic Violence Law that was created in 2005 was meant to be a "single window system where a single law allows you to get shelter, protection, custody, and maintenance. So lawyers manipulate families to say it's 4 cases, but it's one – you just have to tick what you want". The counselor emphasized to the client, "Don't have any hesitation when you write the complaint or when you approach them. If they ask you, 'why didn't you say something earlier', or 'why didn't you approach the police earlier', say 'I was trying to protect my home and marriage' Don't feel guilty or hold back". The counsellor reiterated that the family should not hesitate to come to the center before they met the Women's Cell police officer so that she could help the family prepare their answers and tell them about the kind of questions that they may be asked. She emphasized that the client should be confident while talking

to the police officer because she had nothing to hide or no reason to feel guilty. The client expressed concerns stating that the police might say "you are making this up, why did you wait for so long" or "you only encouraged his advances". The counselor responded, "Don't show yourself as weak, be confident and assertive. Yes, I have tolerated it, why should I leave it [let it go]?". The counselor also targeted the client's feelings of guilt and self-blame by saying "he did this to you – don't blame yourself for what happened. It was not your fault. This is wrong – it was sexual assault – there is no other way to see it". She emphasized that the client needs to be strong and assertive as she takes this case forward, to which the client responded, "Yes I have that in me – I will do it".

Staff members viewed their efforts at systems-level advocacy as being intricately woven with their efforts to facilitate determination and independence among women such that they can engage in self-advocacy,

> If she's come regularly to us for 10-12 times then the 11th time, one sort of confidence comes into her that I can also do something. Because we don't tell them that we are doing this for you. We always tell them that we are standing by you, you're the one who can do it, you have to have the courage, the courage is yours, we are only giving you cooperation. You are making the effort, and if you keep trying then from somewhere or the other we will get justice. We instill this determination in her so that she should not break at any step or she should not feel at any stage that now I can't do anything.
>
> - Arati, female, staff member

Archival data from case files corroborated this through extensive documentation of instances where staff members accompanied clients to their visits to police stations, lawyers, and court appointments. Survivors corroborated the importance of staff members' efforts in

accompanying women and engaging in systems level advocacy. Women saw this as helpful for modeling self-advocacy and giving them confidence in approaching formal systems. One survivor stated,

> The nervousness and tension of going to court and seeing things I had never before, I felt more comfortable when *Didi* [elder sister, referring to counselor] would go with me. Now I do not feel as nervous seeing the lawyer, as before. I feel more confident, and I feel like I can go by myself.
>
> - Jaspreet, female, survivor

This was especially important for women who had experienced long standing isolation and control,

> She [staff member] used to go with me to help me – I got some courage from her, because I had lost the habit of going out of the house - I used to only go out of the house when I was in college. After that those people [in-laws] had made like a frog in the well - they kept me like that, I could never go out of the house.
>
> - Meher, female, survivor

While the process of accompanying clients during their initial engagement with formal systems was seen by both clients and staff members as beneficial, staff members emphasized the importance of cascading support in order to facilitate women's ability to engage in self-advocacy independently. One staff member noted,

> Many women who decide to go to the police are like, I can't go myself, come with me. They need our help, so we go with them initially to the police station. And if she wants help at the Women's Cell, like they don't know what to write or what to put on the complaint, then we go there with her and talk to them. But then after some time we ask

them to go themselves. It is really important to make them self-reliant and also confident that I can take action if needed and I know how to.

- Kavya, female, staff member

Survivors also noted a difference in their interactions with formal systems when they were accompanied by staff from the agency. For example, one survivor noted,

There is a difference. With the police, their behavior was not normal before. They tried so much to smooth things over. And there are some of them that do not support the woman. They keep you sitting for a long time. There were little things that you had to complete and return to them. They kept the process going for a long time. So, having a person from the NGO with me helped, and I saw a change in the police's behavior. It put some pressure on them.

- Bhavna, female, survivor

**Encouraging independence and self-reliance.** In keeping with their understanding of the cyclical nature of the intervention and the need to re-evaluate goals, staff members often brought up the importance of self-reliance and employment with women in order to help them become independent, reducing a potential barrier to leaving the abusive situation. One survivor described how staff members facilitated her employment and self-sufficiency,

She [staff member] told me to learn some work that I could do. I was interested in parlor [salon] work so she gave me the address of a place. She even talked to the managers for me, asking them to teach me. I really like it – I am thinking that I am now starting to stand on my own feet, like I am doing something. Until when am I going to be a burden on my parents? My dad is aging now too. He is tired and in tension from everything that has happened. My mom had become weak too. If she [staff member] had not told me

[about working], I would not even understand what to do, where to go. But now I am seeing changes in myself. The things that I did not even think of before, I am doing those things - like I am even thinking of opening my own parlor, which would be better. I have a little sister too, who can also learn the work. Before I was always afraid, so my in-laws took advantage of my nervousness, but now I feel confident.

- Kajal, female, survivor

This emphasis on facilitating women's self-reliance was also observed in counseling sessions. Here, a counselor was telling a survivor, Neelam, that she needs to find a job or passion in order to support herself, and come to terms with the fact that her relationship has ended,

You learn to do some sort of creative work which you can sit at home and do, so you can handle the home also, but you also get some source of income. Think about your life and future. Make your aim such that in future you don't have to beg anyone else for help. It will give you courage. We have to face the realities of life. You think about your life. We aren't seeing only your house. In the last 20 years we must have seen thousands of homes – it's very necessary to see life practically. Today your parents are supporting you, later who will do it? Time is like sand that you can never hold it in your hand – it slips away – it's slowly, slowly slipping away. The tomorrow that you have ahead of you will not come again, the today that is there is passing by. So we have to plan for the future. We make a plan today that yes I can do this, whatever work is there, it will feel difficult in the beginning, later it will become easier.

- Arti, female, staff member

The staff members' emphasis on fostering self-reliance among survivors was also seen in this informal conversation that was recorded in observation notes,

> The counselor stressed the importance of women's employment. She said that this is something that she always emphasizes with her clients because it gives them a sense of purpose and lets them feel less dependent on their husbands and in-laws. She also referred to the cultural importance placed on marriage. She reported, "Just marriage isn't important – the girl's life is important. It's important to change the mindset - that's the main issue. Just as men can live without marriage, women can. If the community points a finger at a single woman, the community needs to be corrected, not the woman." The counselor therefore emphasized employment, stressing the importance of a good life rather than a married life.

**Building long term networks with formal and informal supports.** An important facet of the agency's work with women was their emphasis on working in the same community as women in order to create networks of support for women and facilitating women's access to the agency's services. The domestic violence centers are physically located in the same community as survivors. The importance of working in the same community as the women is illustrated by the following staff member,

> As we live in the same area as them, that makes a difference. Because they don't have the money [to go elsewhere]. Now we stay in the same community, so they feel that we will go to the center in my community and tell madam their story. So this way, sitting down with them on their own level, drinking water in their own house, so first of all the barrier that is between us, we try to take it away. Like they don't feel that this is madam [someone superior] who has come from outside, she is sitting with us, come let's have some of your tea, so they feel that we can openly share the whole story with us.

> Government agencies can't do the same, they sit in an office - if you go to them fine, if you don't its fine, they are getting their salary.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

Thus, not only are the counseling centers physically located in the same community as the women, the staff members exemplify breaking down barriers by sitting down on the floor with women, instead of sitting at a table, which is culturally associated with government offices or a higher class. In addition to providing immediate help and resources, our analysis suggests that staff members attempt to create networks of support for survivors with both formal and informal supports that extend beyond the agency. All survivors described the commitment and investment of staff members during their engagement with the agency, which led to them feeling like they had a close relationship with the agency and its staff. One survivor noted,

> *Didi* [elder sister referring to counselor] came to our house four or five times. She said that I do not go to people's houses that often but I come here for you. I had *Didi's* full support. She told me how to do things, so things became a lot easier.
>
> - Keerti, female, survivor

Another woman talked about the close bond she had built with one of the counselors, also calling her "*Didi*" or elder sister,

> She considered me a sister - we had a relationship – we had become like relatives. So when I have no one, this sister is there or this mother is there. There was so much love between us – any little thing that happened – [I would think] I'll go meet *Didi* – any small thing happened – I'll meet *Didi*. She used to give me reason – she gave me brains.
>
> - Payal, female, survivor

Many women describing continuing to visit staff members at the agency long after their cases had been closed due to the close relationship that they had built over time with staff members,

> I think I have gotten help and I like it. That is why I come repeatedly. If I am just going out of the house, I come here too. I like talking to madam. I learn about different things that I normally don't hear about. I come here and get to learn about it. Like I learned that people should divide up work in the house. I didn't know that before, I thought that I had to do all the work in the house.
>
> - Nandini, female, survivor

In addition to creating an emotional support network with the agency, survivors talked about how their association with an NGO created a sense of fear and accountability among the perpetrators of violence since an external agency knew about the violence and could report it. For example, one survivor stated,

> I came here with the thought that I was very disturbed. And I was not the only person that was suffering, my children were too. His family [in-laws] did not care at all. So, because of that, I had come here. I knew that these people [NGO] handle things like this, so they [in-laws] would receive some pressure. Because when I tried, they would start up again and behavior goes bad [violence would recur]. So, I thought that by coming here, there would be some pressure, by involving people outside of the home, maybe they would fix themselves then.
>
> - Smita, female, survivor

By involving the agency, Smita reported the following outcomes,

> Now, I feel like they are fixing their behaviors. I felt that there was a bit of pressure built. Why should a relationship be ruined? Even I knew that if we break this relationship, no matter how hard I try, it would affect my children - they are young so they wouldn't understand it. So, I gave him time to fix himself. So, if he fixes himself its fine, if not, I would get a divorce. Things are a bit more normal now. There is some pressure built, and there is some fear now. Like, she can go complain - so, there is some more pressure now.
>
> - Smita, female, survivor

The agency's value on creating a long-term support system for clients was also observed in counseling sessions with clients. In one of the early sessions with an adolescent client, the counselor said,

> You don't feel yourself to be weak at any time – and if at any time you have any problem – if you feel your father is putting pressure – your mummy is putting pressure – you've seen my office – just come here. We'll see to it. When no one is by your side to support you – then whatever is there, we are all there together at your side.
>
> - Arti, female, staff member

In addition, the agency also creates networks with the survivors' informal supports by involving them in the intervention, including them in counseling services, and providing mediation services. One staff member noted the importance of including informal supports in order to help with clients' self-determination,

> We motivate her, but we also tell her family about it – calling them in, doing counseling with them, creating awareness among them so that they can support her. So when the family becomes 'we' or when other women join her and it becomes a group working together – then there is a big change in her.

- Priti, female, staff member

**Reconciling Empowerment with Culture: Mediation Efforts**

Acknowledging the cultural emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and the many challenges that women face after a broken marriage including stigma, dishonor, and difficulty with remarriage, staff members at the agency always entertain the possibility of mediation with survivors. For example, highlighting the role of cultural forces that make mediation necessary, a staff member noted,

> Most women who come to us want to maintain the marriage. Because many times there is this pressure to stay in the *sasural* [marital home], even from their own parents. Even if the woman goes to her parents' house for some time, the parents will say "we can't keep her for too long" because it looks bad, and then people will start asking questions.
>
> - Kavya, female, staff member

Additionally, this staff member noted other barriers to leaving the abusive situation,

> Many times these women are not even self-sufficient – so then if you don't have a job, and you can't go to your parents' house, where do you go? So we have to help them with that – we have to see, is there any possibility of mediation? What does she want? How does she want to move forward?
>
> - Kavya, female, staff member

During a conversation with the researcher, one staff member described the mediation process as facilitating communication,

> The two parties many times don't know where they are right and wrong. And when both of them are given the opportunity to speak their minds, when they calmly talk face-to-face, then they realize that it was their mistake. And they don't tell each other as much as

> they tell their family members and those things are hidden from each other. Like, he said this to his mom, his mom said this to me. These issues go away. So, their misunderstandings go away.

Similarly, another staff member described mediation as an effort to improve the relationship, "*Our focus is to help her, but we also have to prevent violence. So our focus is not on breaking the relationship, but to improve the relationship, if that is what she wants. So then we do counseling and mediation*". Staff members highlighted the importance of building accountability following mediation efforts. This was done by various ways by the agency, including follow-ups, home visits, and encouraging women to return to the agency in case of problems.

> So first of all we prepare them, because if you don't raise your voice, they [perpetrators] will not know and we cannot get justice for you. We call that person, who is perpetrating the injustice, we call that family too, and sit them down face-to-face. We give the other side also a date to hear their side and after that we call them together. Then after that we see what the woman wants. So then after that, if she agrees she wants to stay in the same house, we bring about an understanding between them and send them. But we keep them as a follow up case, and for about 3 months we call them back, how are you feeling now. They can also always come to us if problems start again.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

One staff member mentioned of home visits,

> Home visits help to build some pressure on families, that yes, there is an NGO watching and they know what is going on, and they are looking into the matter. The thing is, without any involvement, people just continue the harassment. People are so used to

getting away with everything that unless there is this fear, they will continue the harassment and abuse. So home visits help build that accountability and pressure.

- Arti, female, staff member

The agency's process of mediation is exemplified through the timelines created to understand women's journeys. For example, in the case of Sapna (Figure 4.14), she was married when she was underage, at the age of 16, and stayed with her family for two years until she was of legal age. Once she was 18 years old, her husband and in-laws wanted to perform the *gauna* ceremony, which is a ceremony for the consummation of marriage, associated with child marriages. Sapna refused to perform this ceremony and was taken forcefully by her husband to her in-laws' house. She experienced harassment at her in-laws' house, subsequently calling the police after her mother-in-law physically assaulted her. However, this did not result in ensuring her safety because the police engaged in mediation with the family, allowing the husband and his mother a second chance.

Fearing her safety, the girl's mother approached the agency. The girl and her mother wanted to mediate with the family but wanted to ensure Sapna's safety. The agency's efforts at mediation were seen through various meetings where the husband and in-laws were told that violence will not be tolerated. While the agency's attempt at mediation to address the physical violence was successful, Sapna later contacted the agency letting them know that her husband was not giving her money for her expenses, and had started engaging in excessive alcoholism, making her fear for her safety. The agency engaged in counseling with Sapna, giving her the opportunity to voice her fears and concerns, and followed up with mediation with her husband. Her husband was warned that it is his responsibility to provide for his wife and any violence on his part will not be tolerated. Two days later, the agency did a home visit to ensure that Sapna

was safe and her needs were taken care of. A couple of months later, despite no issues being reported by the client, the agency encouraged Sapna to find a job and make herself self-sufficient, following which she began to learn stitching. A month later, she approached the agency again because she wanted to pursue her education but her sister in law had prevented her. The agency engaged in additional mediation on her behalf, counseling the sister-in-law about the importance of allowing Sapna to follow her goals. This mediation attempt was successful as well, resulting in Sapna being able to pursue her education. Follow ups with Sapna indicated that her home situation was normal and she was not experiencing any further conflicts.

A similar process was observed with Juhi (see Figure 4.6). Juhi was experiencing physical and emotional abuse perpetrated by her mother-in-law, and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse perpetrated by her husband. After an unsuccessful police contact, Juhi approached the agency with goals of safety and mediation with her husband and in-laws. During mediation with the husband and in laws, the agency communicated to the family that violence will not be tolerated and that Juhi was prepared to take legal action if it continued. The agency also encouraged her husband to find a job to support her, since she was working in multiple houses as a house-help to make ends meet. The agency further encouraged Juhi to draw on support from her own family, who she had not disclosed the abuse to. Following extensive mediation efforts, Juhi was living happily with her in-laws and reported no violence at follow-ups. She also reported that her husband had found a job and was also helping her with her housework.

**Reflecting on Outcomes as Part of the Empowerment Process**

A wide range of empowerment related outcomes were reported by survivors and staff members, which varied depending on the goals that women approached the agency with. One of

the ways in which we tried to understand the outcomes for survivors was through the timelines. These helped us explicate women's personal journeys and the outcomes associated with their goals (see Supplementary Figures). Consistent with their goals, many women reported continuing their relationship and experiencing an improved and positive home environment following their engagement with the agency (for example see Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 for Samaira, Sonam, and Juhi). Others reported successfully separating from their abusive husbands or in-laws and reported receiving regular spousal support to support their children or themselves (for examples see Figures 4.2, 4.8, 4.10 for Suman, Pooja, and Payal).

Many women had sought and were successfully pursuing employment opportunities, being financially independent regardless of whether they were with their partners ("*I have my own money now. He can't keep my kids hungry. In my house, I can carry my own expenses. I get courage from that*") or not ("*It's been one year since my case closed, and now I am making my own money, and raising my kids by myself*"). For examples, see Figures 4.10, 4.12, 4.9 for Payal, Jaspreet, and Anu. All women reported seeing positive changes in themselves, referring to these changes by varied terms like confidence, courage and determination. One survivor described her new-found courage as follows,

> I see courage in myself– that there is someone for me, I have some rights, no one can say anything to me, no one can do anything to me. I feel like I have my neighborhood – these are all my sisters – they are there – they will care about me, will look after me – nothing can happen to me. I feel like I am not alone and that these people are with me.
>
> - Payal, female, survivor

Another survivor, Suman stated,

> They have helped quite a lot. I was mentally quite disturbed – I was depressed – a lot – so they said you come here regularly, you'll get some relief, your mental condition will become ok. So I found that very good – coming here my stress reduced, so I used to come here and just sit here. I would talk to them – I used to feel good about that. From here I got mental strength also. The most important thing – I got the courage to talk – they [in-laws] had made me so scared and had kept me so suppressed [sic] for so long that my confidence was completely finished - after coming here I got confidence. They helped me – they talked to me nicely – I felt good, I felt there is someone with me.
>
> - Suman, female, survivor

A staff member described an example of a client she worked with,

> I remember one woman that I worked with – for a long time – she told me, "I got my energy back". She said I was losing my self-confidence and motivation, but you showed me the path. She felt like her husband was controlling, she could not go anywhere. We knew a driving school here – so we sent her there to learn driving. She was interested in nursing, so according to her interest, we gave her a referral for a nursing program.
>
> - Poonam, female, staff member

Staff members similarly used different terms to describe what they want to work on with women. This staff member described their work as increasing women's "inner strength" and courage,

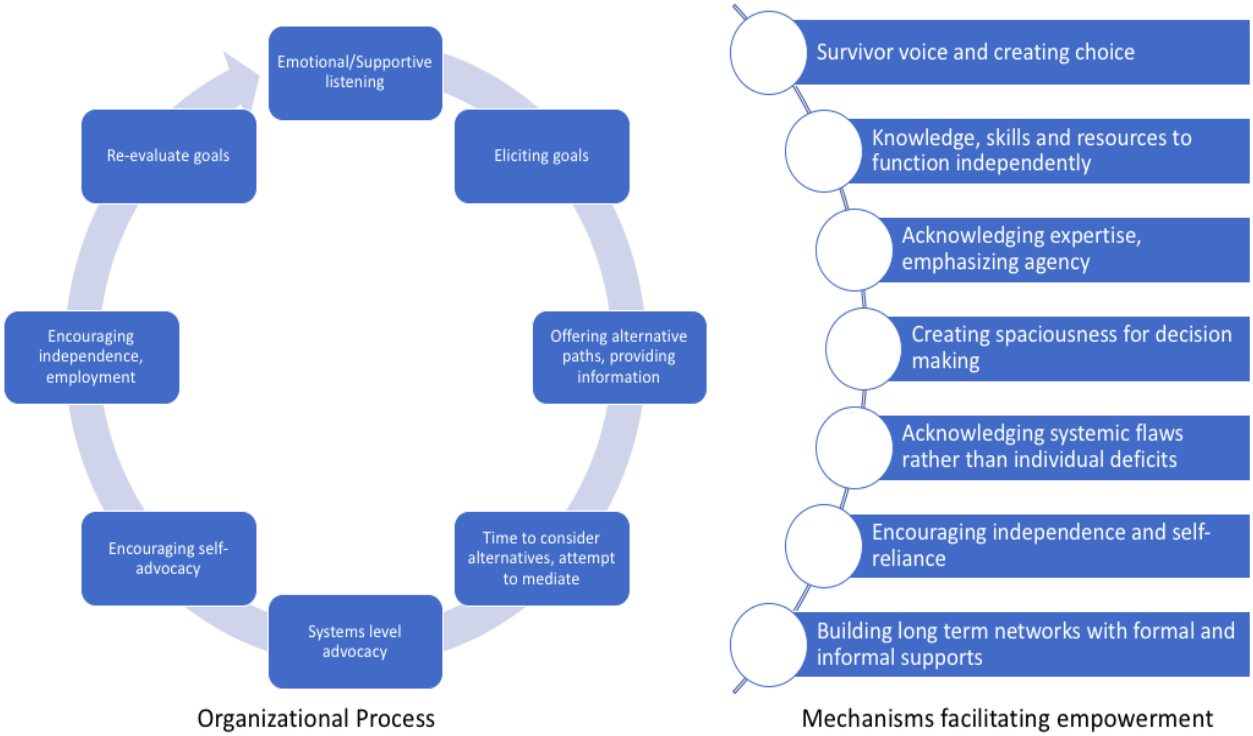
> The problem is that women lack inner strength. We have to increase their strength. Only if their courage increases, we can do something. Their courage is low, since women have so much pressure on them, so that is lacking. Education is important, but many women

even after being educated, few come forward. They are educated, but they are still not that courageous.

- Priya, female, staff member

The model described in *Figure 4.1* was the last phase of our analysis, where we created a pictorial representation of our codes to understand how the agency's processes facilitates the empowerment of women.

Figure 4.1: *Organizational process of empowering survivors and mechanisms facilitating empowerment*




As seen in *Figure 4.1*, various mechanisms of empowerment were identified in the agency's process of working with women like facilitating survivor voice and choice.

## Discussion

This study examined a grassroots organization's response to domestic violence in order to understand the organizational processes and mechanisms that facilitate empowerment of

survivors. This study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, by adopting a multi-informant approach, this study highlights the important role that institutions like grassroots agencies can play in supporting women's goals and facilitating their empowerment, and explicates various mechanisms that appear to be crucial for empowering women. Second, the study illuminates the various ways in which the agency's model of empowering women aligns with best practices in the U.S. Third, this study explicates some key ways in which this model is distinct from dominant practices in the U.S., as seen in its adoption of cultural values in order to be relevant and sustainable in the Indian context.

Our results, particularly the timelines describing women's personal journeys, highlight that women were active in their help-seeking efforts and their efforts to ensure their safety even before they began their association with the agency. This included efforts to engage formal systems (like police) and informal supports (like family and parents). The timelines also suggest that women were largely unsuccessful in maintaining their safety prior to their engagement with the agency, but were able to see positive outcomes facilitated by their engagement with the agency. Almost all women had made multiple attempts to leave the abuser in order to ensure their safety. These findings support the survivor theory (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988), which suggests that rather than being dependent victims, women play an active role in ensuring their safety, making attempts to engage formal and informal systems of support in the process. However, they are largely unsuccessful due to the failure of formal systems to meet their needs, as was also seen in our timelines.

Our results explicate the various mechanisms that appear to contribute to positive outcomes for women, including their empowerment. These include the agency's adoption of a

survivor-centered approach; an emphasis on collaborative, trusting relationships with staff and meeting women where they are at; systems advocacy; and fostering independence.

By engaging in practices that center survivor voice and acknowledge their expertise and agency, the organization engages in a survivor-centered model of intervention. Survivor-centered models have been defined as listening to survivors and providing them with meaningful choices (e.g. Allen et al., 2004; Davies & Lyon, 2014; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Goodman and Epstein (2008) note that the concept of voice is central to feminist theory, describing how the domestic violence movement viewed listening to survivors as a way of restoring their self-esteem, personal power, and autonomy. Thus, for survivors of domestic violence, who are victims of control and experience a loss of agency, this step of re-instilling choice and agency is particularly important. Such survivor-centered interventions have been found to be associated with increased reporting of abuse (Hotaling & Buzawa, 2003), increased use of services (Zweig, Burt, & Van Ness, 2003), better mental health outcomes and improved quality of life (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2010; Perez, Johnson, & Wright, 2012).

Staff members in the organization foster a collaborative, non-hierarchical relationship with survivors, and have shared power in the relationship, with survivors having the onus for decision making. This also enables the agency to tailor their intervention to each survivor's unique needs and context. Our findings also highlight the centrality of the relationship between the survivor and staff member. In addition to providing emotional support and ensuring that the survivor felt heard, the staff members in the agency were able to engage in a trusting, collaborative relationship that minimized power differences or hierarchies between the survivor and provider. The central role of the relationship between the advocate and survivors has been demonstrated in literature in the U.S. which finds that advocacy can oftentimes serve as a form

of emotional support (e.g. Bell & Goodman, 2001). This kind of relationship between staff members and survivors and the support received by women as a result may be especially important for domestic violence survivors who experience eroded social support networks over the course of their victimization (Sullivan, Basta, et al., 1992; Trotter & Allen, 2009), and are likely to provide an important route to healing from interpersonal trauma.

A related mechanism that appears to facilitate positive outcomes for women is the agency's emphasis on meeting women where they are – both physically and metaphorically. The agency is physically located in the same community as the survivors and is largely run by providers from the local community in order to remove the perceived hierarchy or barrier between the community and the institution. This participatory approach acknowledges the deeply entrenched structural barriers and power dynamics that influence women's disclosure of violence and empowerment and facilitates women's access to the agency's services by virtue of removing some of these barriers (Ahrens, Isas, & Viveros, 2011). Koss and colleagues (2017) refer to this process of breaking down power dynamics as 'cultural humility' and view this as being core to centering survivor voice and responding effectively to violence.

Additionally, by engaging in systems level advocacy, the agency strives to making the community more responsive to needs of women, taking a strengths-based approach to their work with women. Further, by providing women with knowledge about, and access to community resources, and assisting them with navigating these resources, the agency is likely to decrease women's dependence on their spouses or in-laws, reducing the risk for re-victimization. For example, the agency's emphasis on promoting self-reliance among survivors by encouraging them to seek employment and assisting them with this process is likely to enhance women's ability to leave an abusive or high-risk situation. A large body of literature has shown that

financial dependence, lack of knowledge of or access to appropriate community resources, and ineffective community resources present as barriers to women leaving abusive situations (Murray, 2008; Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumptz, & Davidson, 1992). Further, various studies have demonstrated that income or economic dependency is most often the primary reason for continuing in the abusive situation (e.g. Anderson & Saunders, 2003), making the outcomes seen for women in our study where many of them had successfully pursued employment particularly promising.

Importantly, while this was a model that emerged from the efforts of a grassroots organization to meet the needs of a specific community and its women, many of the mechanisms that were evident in the resulting model capitalize on best practices on response that have been documented in the West (e.g. Bybee & Sullivan, 2002; Davies & Lyon, 2014; Goodman & Epstein, 2008; Wilson, Fauci, & Goodman, 2015). Ellsberg et al. (2014) review the evidence on successful interventions for domestic violence and suggest that survivor-centered, advocacy, and home-visitation programs can reduce women's risk of further victimization. Goodman and Epstein (2008) advise that all domestic violence services be developed with consideration of three guiding principles: voice, community, and economic empowerment; elements that were seen in the current agency's model of intervention. Additionally, many of the agency's practices like implementing a survivor-guided intervention that acknowledges the expertise of the survivor, connects women to community resources, and emphasizes making systems more responsive to women's needs, have been found to be effective with the Community Advocacy Project (CAP) (Bybee & Sullivan, 2002). This program has documented positive outcomes like less physical violence over time, better quality of life and higher social support over a two-year follow-up period (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999), and an increased sense of personal power among

survivors (Sullivan, Campbell, Angelique, Eby, & Davidson, 1994), regardless of the constellation of needs with which women presented (Allen et al., 2004).

The model highlighted in this study also corresponds to other frameworks. Importantly, the various mechanisms of change outlined in our model demonstrate that the agency engages in many of the routine trauma-informed practices (Harris & Fallot, 2001) adopted by domestic violence services (see Wilson, Fauci, & Goodman, 2015) like facilitating emotional safety, restoring choice and control, facilitating connection with social supports, the community, and other survivors, and building survivor strengths. Taken together, these studies highlight that the agency under study does work which is in alignment with its goals of empowerment and reflects many of the best practices in the field.

In addition to having practices that align with best practices demonstrated in the U.S., the model described in the present study is distinct in at least three key ways from the dominant response to domestic violence in the U.S. First, the agency appears to lay a strong emphasis on strengthening women's social networks beyond the organization, recognizing that survivors' communities are critical to social change, particularly in the Indian cultural context. This approach also acknowledges that women's connection to a larger, supportive community is important for their safety (Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt, 2005). Women's embeddedness and connection to their community may be especially important in the Indian cultural context, where women's decision to disclose violence or separate from her husband may go against cultural norms. This also serves to restore social ties that may be severed during the period of abuse which may be marked by social isolation and control. Goodman and Smyth (2011) argue that most mainstream domestic violence service models have emphasized formal systems of care and failed to prioritize engagement of survivors' informal social support

networks as a part of their work, making this agency's approach unique and promising for positive outcomes. Social isolation has been found to increase risk of abuse, and therefore creating networks of social support is likely to increase women's protection against future abuse (Goodman et al., 2005), and remove a potential barrier to leaving the abusive situation (Sullivan et al., 1992). Social support among survivors of domestic violence has also been found to be associated with lower levels of suicide risk, mental health difficulties, and general distress (Adkins & Kamp Dush, 2010; Kaslow, Thompson, Brooks, & Twomey, 2000). The agency's emphasis on enhancing women's social connections is also in line with the network-oriented approach advocated by scholars in the U.S. (Goodman & Smyth, 2011).

The second key way that the current agency's model is distinguished from the dominant domestic violence delivery models in the U.S. is in its emphasis on efforts to mediate with the perpetrators of violence. The agency's emphasis on mediation arises from an understanding that most women who approach them wish to stop the violence without ending their relationship and recognizing the cultural costs and consequences that women may have to face upon ending the relationship given the cultural emphasis on the sanctity of marriage (Menon & Allen, 2018), and stigma faced by divorcees and single mothers (Amato, 1994). This is in contrast to many domestic violence interventions in the U.S. which explicitly state leaving the abuser as a goal (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). The assumption that women can leave abusive situations if they want to not only ignores barriers that prevent women from leaving, but also assumes that the only option is to leave the relationship, ignoring agency and cultural factors (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Further, various studies have also challenged the notion that leaving the abusive relationship results in the best outcome for women, with many studies suggesting that the violence may not end when a woman leaves (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000) and can

often escalate, sometimes resulting in fatality (McFarlane, Campbell, & Watson, 2002). The cultural costs of ending the relationship, which could result in eroded social support, along with difficulties with employment and self-sufficiency (Logan & Walker, 2004) may make mediation a viable option for some women, particularly in the Indian context.

The agency therefore attempts to mediate with women's husbands and in-laws, and appears to achieve successful outcomes through this process. The reduced violence experienced by women following mediation is likely to be a function of various factors. It may be related to the perception that an external agency is aware of the violence and abuse, the knowledge that the woman has a relationship built with this agency, a fear of legal consequences if the violence is reported, and/or the threat of shaming the family should this be disclosed to the public.

Finally, the third way in which this agency's approach to empowerment is distinct, lies in its emphasis on the use of rights-based language. Staff members used this language when they described the importance of helping women understand their rights, and survivors used the terminology of rights when they described learning about their rights, recognizing domestic violence as an injustice, which then gave them confidence in pursuing justice. Similar to adopting a systems-based advocacy approach, a rights-based approach to development acknowledges equal access to resources and emphasizes assisting marginalized people to access these resources (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). This approach also introduces an ethical dimension to development which provides a basis for holding systems accountable for citizens' rights (Hausermann, 1998).

This study has some important limitations. The qualitative study design prevents us from making causal claims about the mechanisms that might be related to positive outcomes for

survivors. Further, since this study focused on a single setting, our findings may not generalize to other settings in other cultural contexts. However, this study informs our understanding of employing an empowerment-based approach in a patriarchal context, highlighting the importance of engaging in social change along with individual change.

Despite these limitations, the study has some notable strengths. The incorporation of multiple perspectives (staff and survivors) and multiple sources of data allowed us to get a rich, contextualized understanding of the agency's work with survivors. Our interviews with survivors allowed us to give voice to survivors' experiences and center their experiences in understanding the effectiveness of the organization's work. Through a relatively long-term engagement with the agency, the researcher was able to witness up-close the work of the agency, including being able to observe a number of cases at different stages of their engagement with the agency. To our knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to examine the role of a grassroots agency in facilitating the empowerment of survivors of domestic violence in India.

## Supplementary Figures

Key for figures:


Figure 4.2: Suman

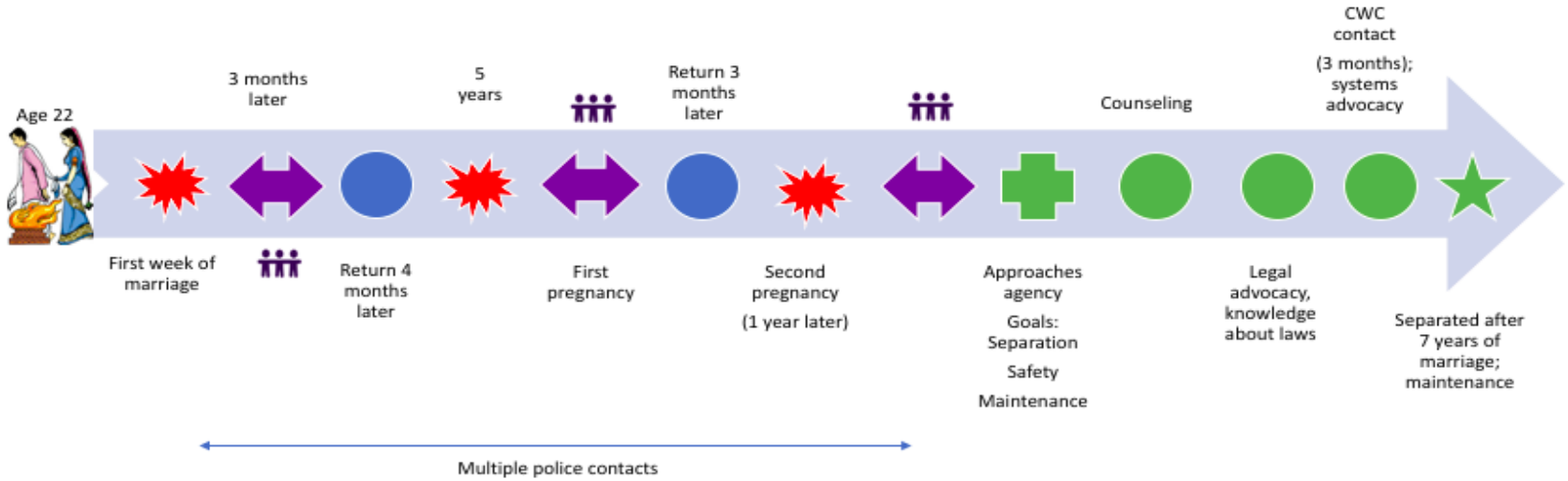


Figure 4.3: Kajal

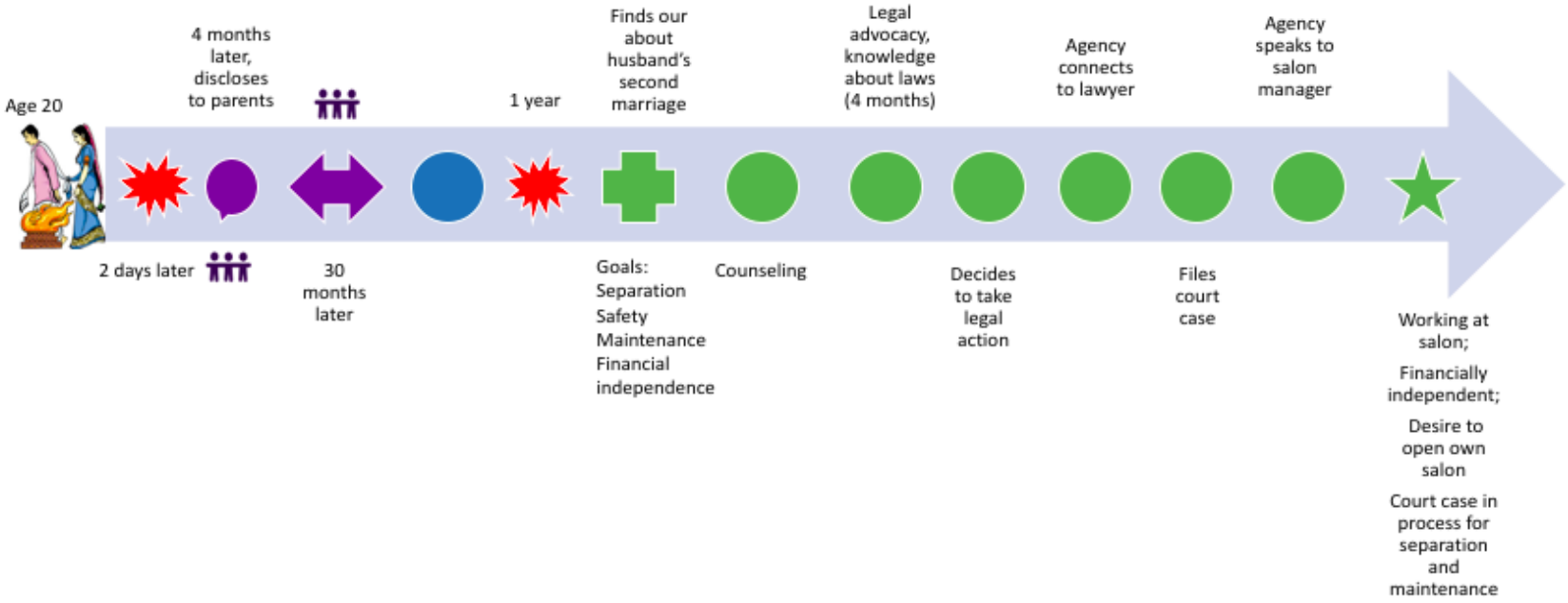


Figure 4.4: Samaira

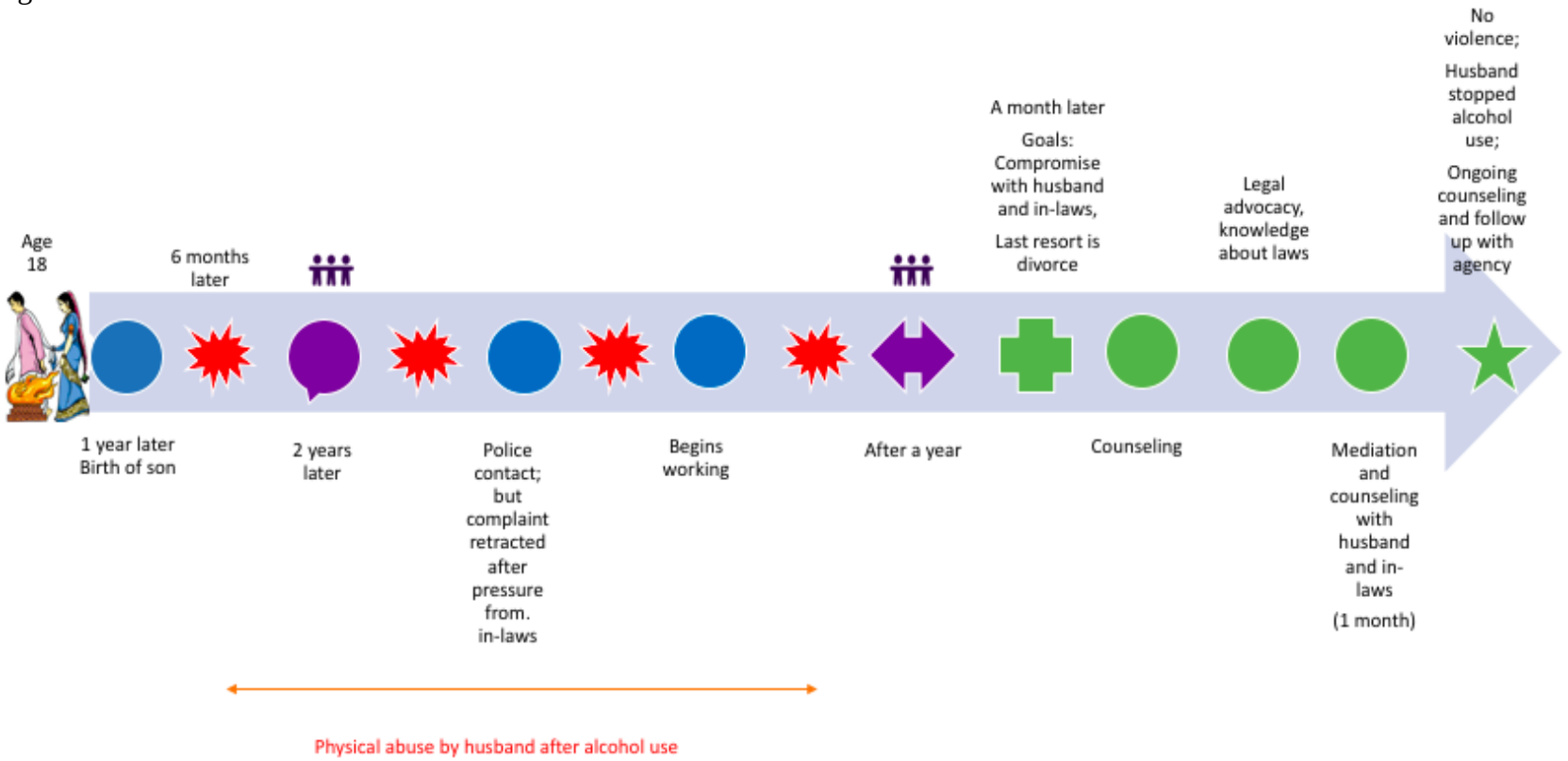


Figure 4.5: Sonam

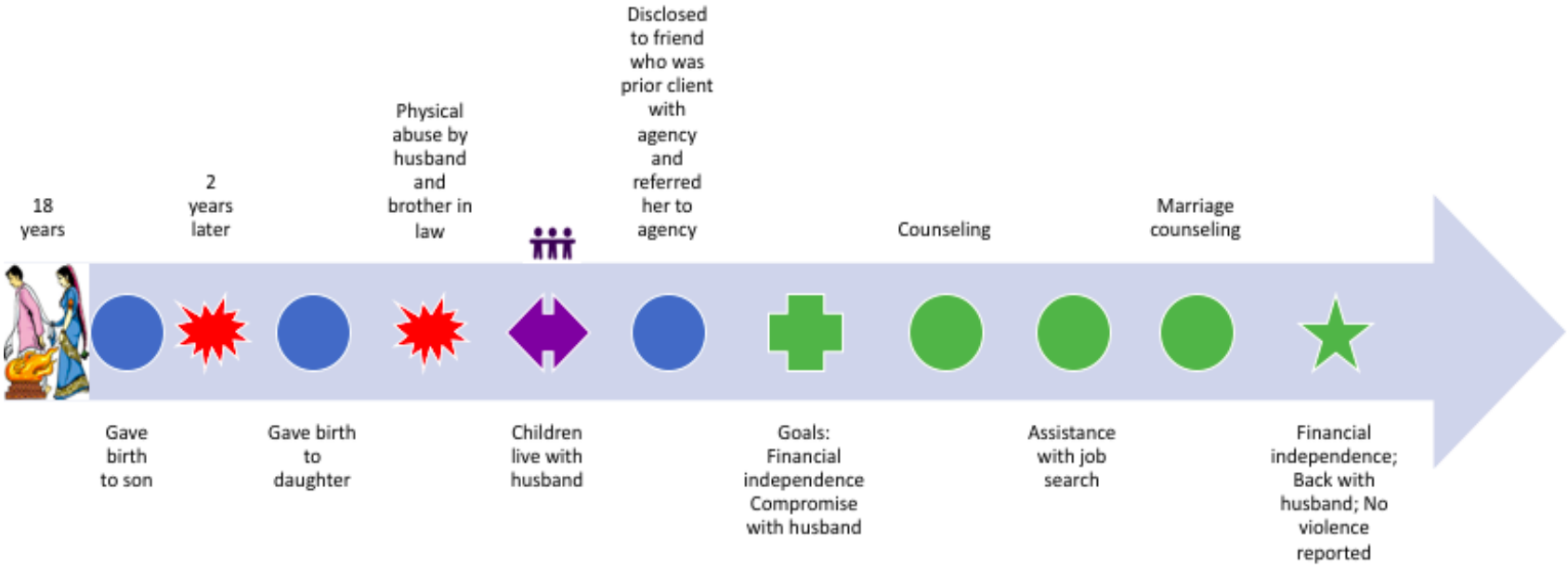



Figure 4.6: Juhi

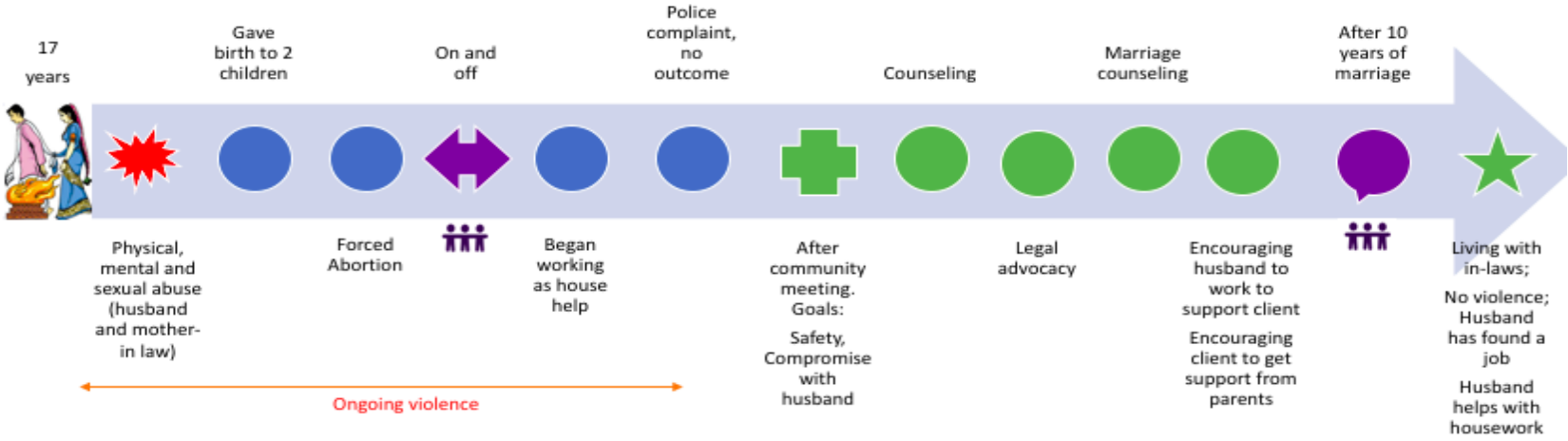


Figure 4.7: Neelam

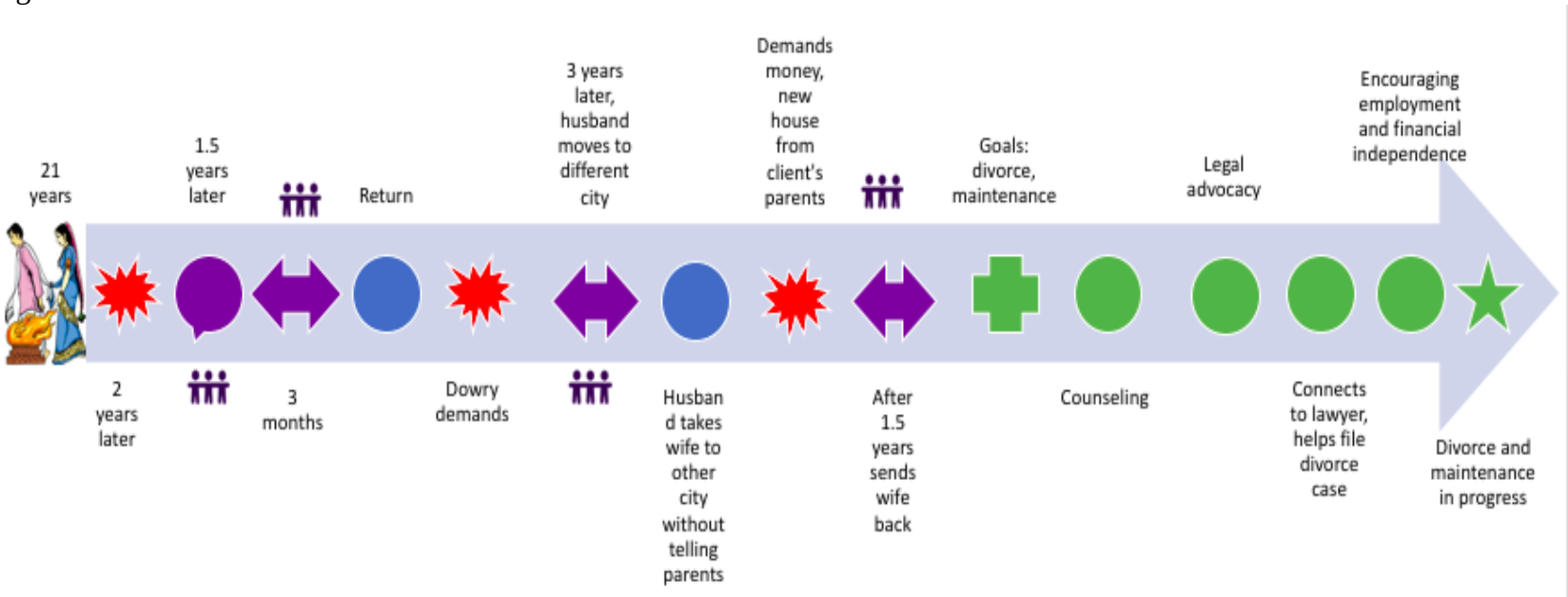



Figure 4.8: Pooja

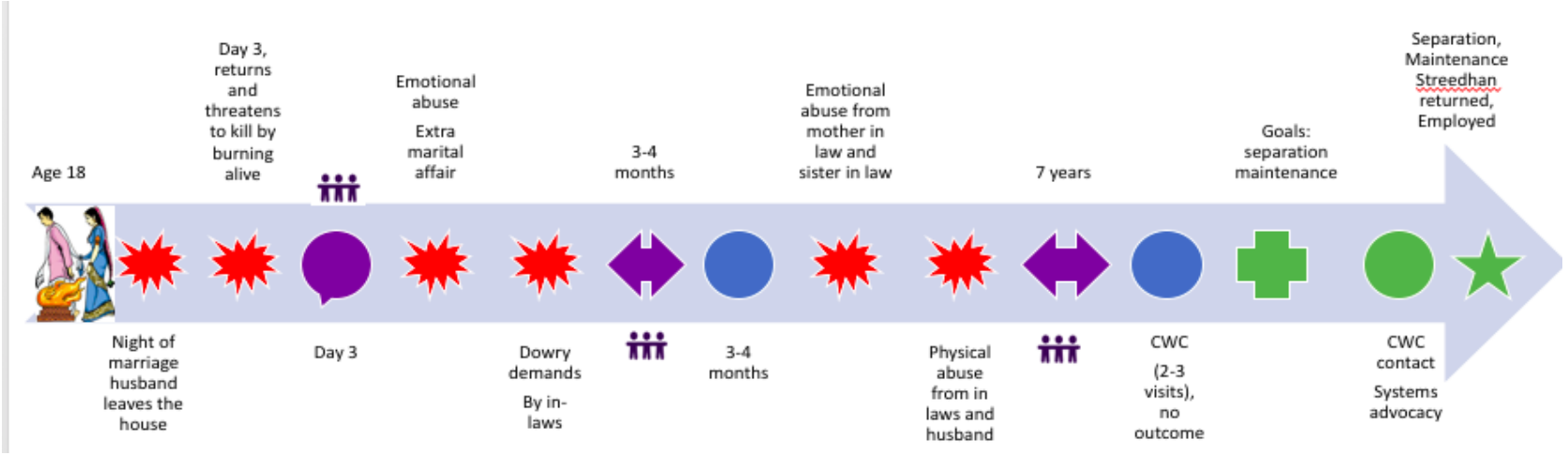


Figure 4.9: Anu

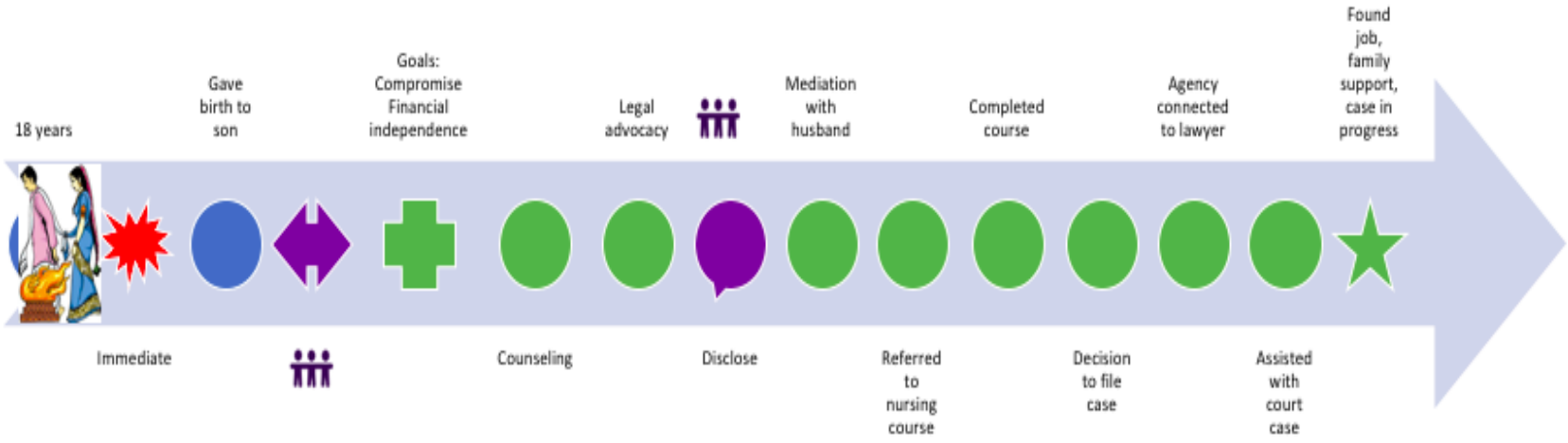



Figure 4.10: Payal

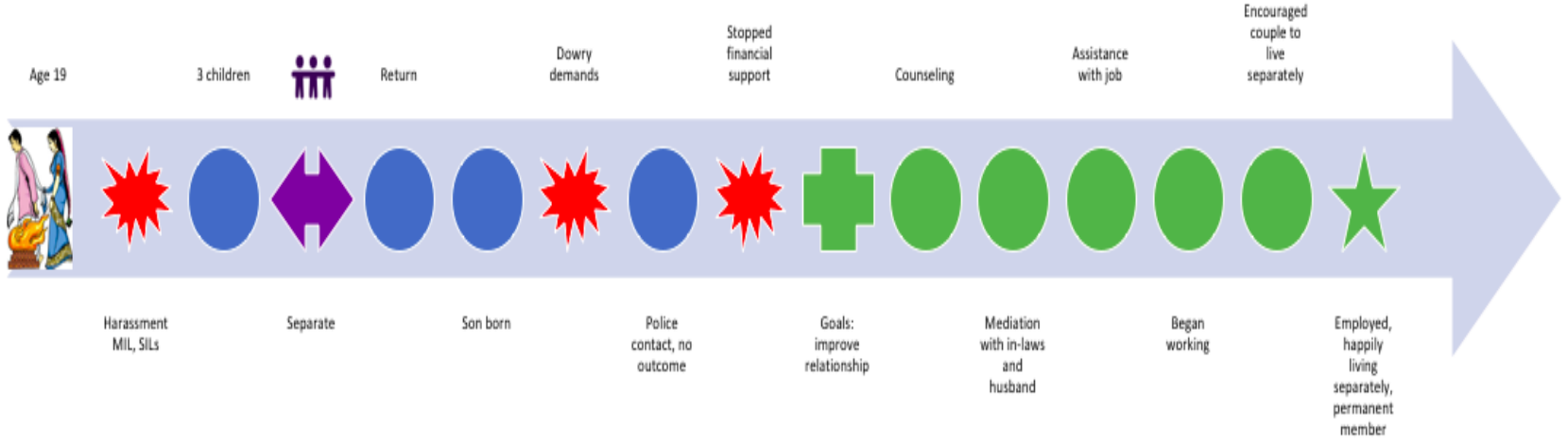


Figure 4.11: Seema

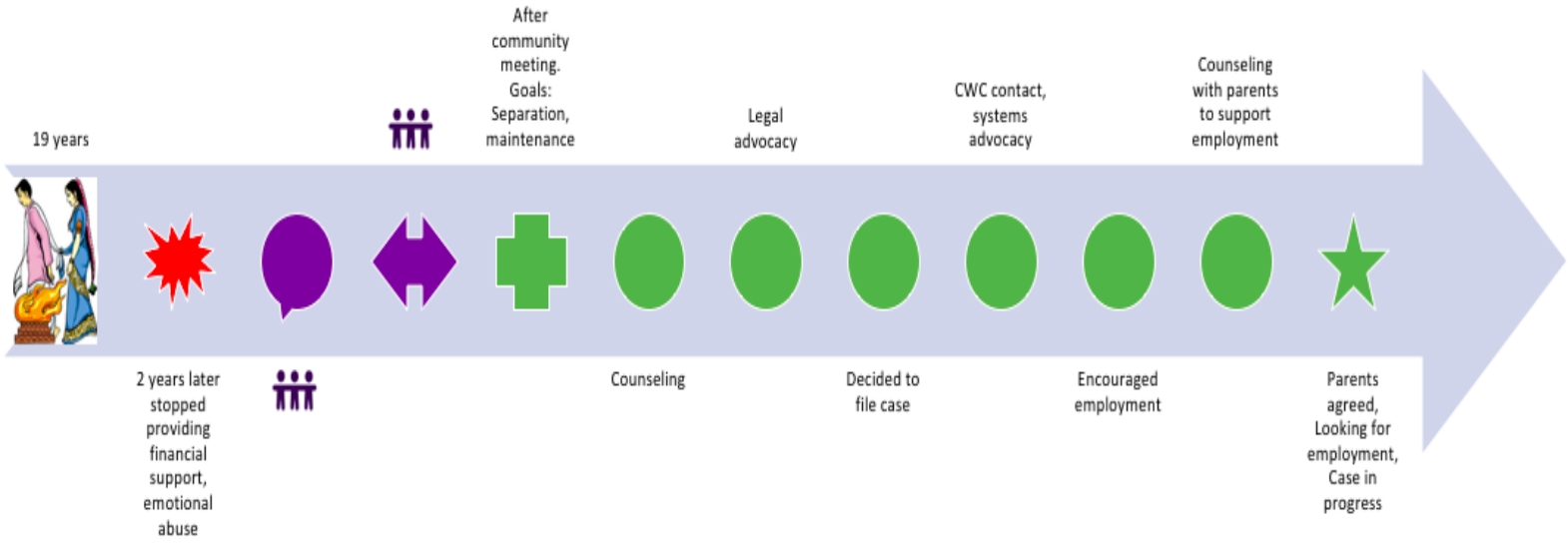


Figure 4.12: Jaspreet

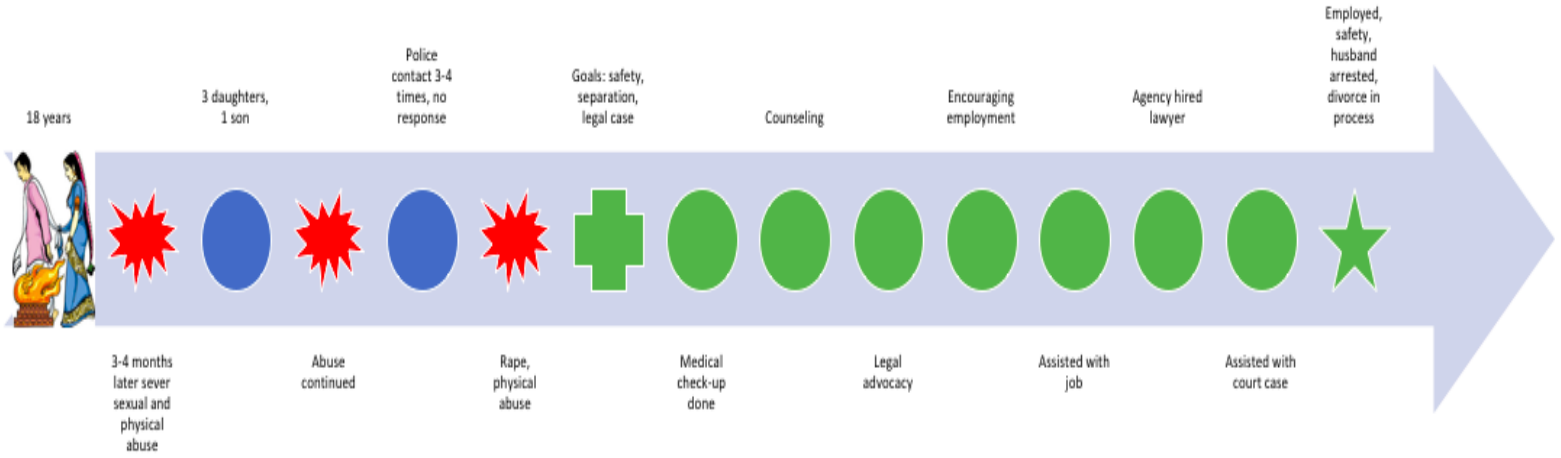


Figure 4.13: Bhavna

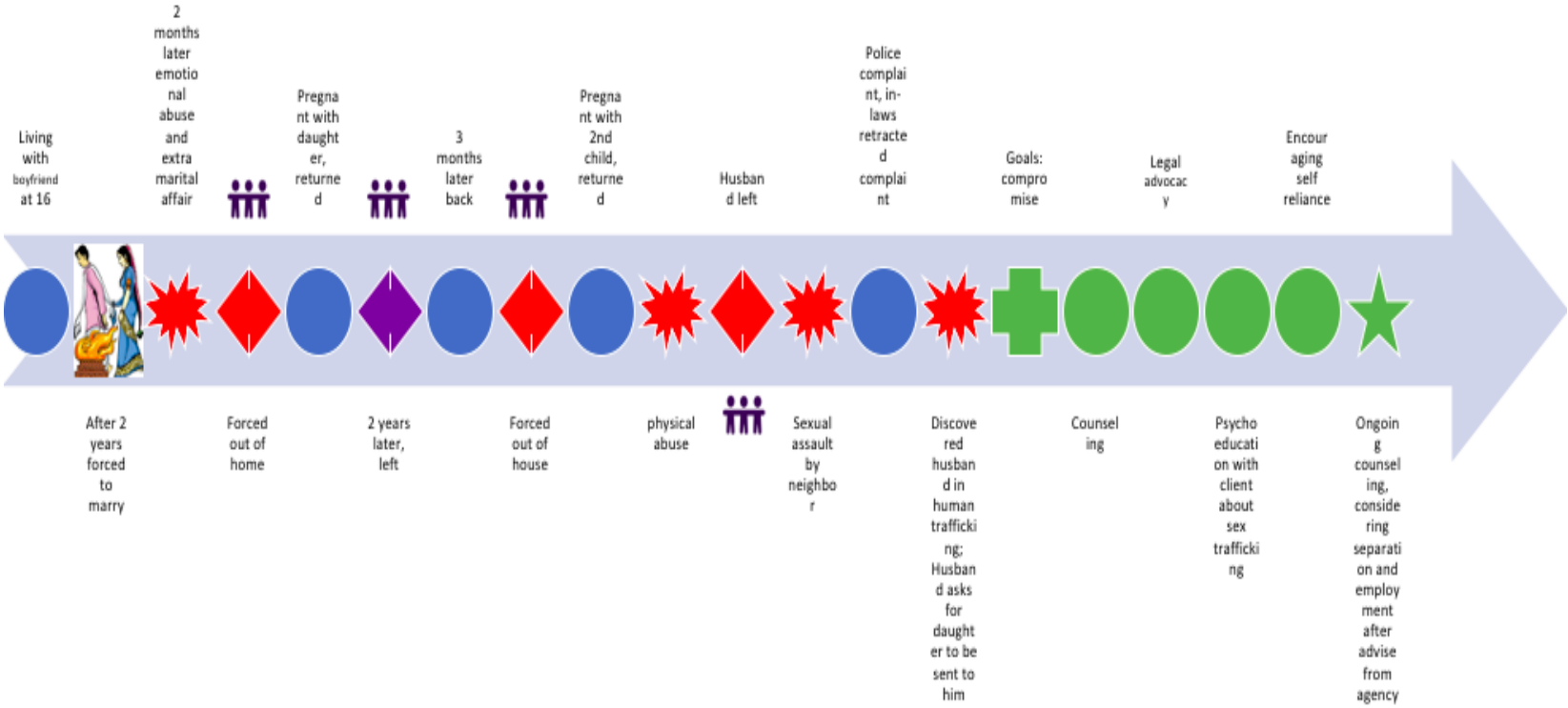
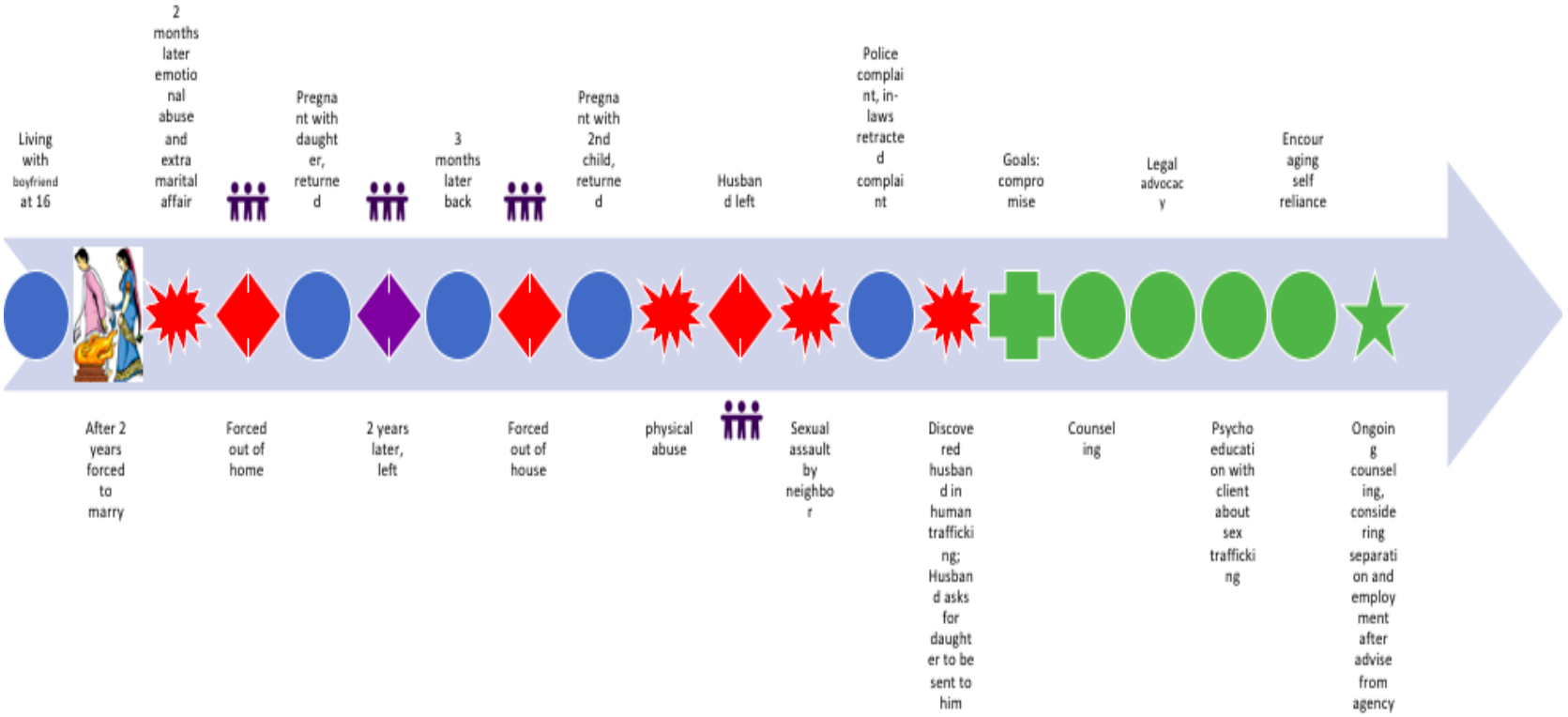


Figure 4.14: Sapna



# CHAPTER 5:

# TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Intimate partner violence has long been recognized as a public health concern globally and there is increasing evidence suggesting that women in developing countries are especially vulnerable to violence perpetrated by partners (Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, Khorshed, & Mozumder, 2003). Domestic violence in India includes violence perpetrated not just by one's husband or spouse, but also by one's in-laws, taking a distinct familial characteristic. The latest statistics from the reported cases of crimes against women suggest that violence perpetrated by one's husband and in-laws accounts for close to 33% of reported cases (National Crime Records Bureau, 2017). In research studies, the prevalence of domestic violence in India varies from 18% to 70% across states (e.g. International Institute for Population Sciences, 2007; Krishnan, 2005). Importantly, these studies only account for violence perpetrated by spouses.

There is a growing body of literature on the formal systems response to violence against women in India. To date, studies suggest that the formal systems response is characterized by unhelpful services and lack of institutional support for survivors (Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005), time delays in investigations (Dave & Solanki, 2000), insensitive attitudes of law enforcement and patriarchal biases (Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005; Menon & Allen, 2018), and inadequacy of the legal response (Ghosh & Choudhari, 2011; Ghosh, 2013). In contrast to formal systems like law enforcement and criminal justice, studies suggest that survivors tend to have more positive experiences with women's agencies, grassroots organizations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g. Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005). Recent efforts to engage in systems change in the response to violence against women in

India suggest that lawyers, academics, NGOs, government agencies, and various women's groups are attempting to work collaboratively to address the issue of violence against women (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). Further, our previous study on the formal systems response to VAW in India suggests that NGOs and women's organizations are at the heart of this systems change process (Menon & Allen, 2018). This study sought to examine how a grassroots agency positions itself to promote institutional change in the response to domestic violence, that is, how it functions as an empowered setting to promote change.

## Empowering and Empowered Settings

In understanding what facets of institutions can facilitate their ability to promote broader systems change, the framework of empowering settings can be particularly useful. Specifically, it is likely that in order to be an empowered setting that promotes institutional change, the agency needs to empower its members to be agents of social change. Previous studies have examined organizational level characteristics of empowering settings, i.e. settings that empower their members. Maton and Salem (1995) initially identified four organizational level factors that characterized empowering settings, and later based on a literature review of empowering settings, Maton (2008) expanded this to a total of six organizational characteristics that were important for member empowerment and characterized empowering settings. These are described next.

**Group based belief system.** This includes the core values and ideology of the setting. According to Maton (2008), empowering settings are characterized by group-based belief systems that inspire change, are strengths-based, and focused beyond the self, invoking a larger shared purpose.

**Core activities.** These include the basic activities in the setting. Maton (2008) described empowering settings as involving engaging activities that are meaningful to the members in terms of their individual goals and cultural backgrounds and involved an active learning process which is participatory in nature.

**Relational environment.** This includes the quality and nature of interpersonal and intergroup relationships in the setting, including having caring relationships and experiencing a sense of community both within and outside the setting.

**Opportunity role structure.** This includes the availability of pervasive, multifunctional and accessible roles within a setting that offer opportunities for active participation, learning and development.

**Leadership.** According to Maton (2008) leadership can contribute to empowerment directly or indirectly through their capacity to motivate and influence members. Maton (2008) characterized the leadership in empowering organizations as inspirational (able to motivate and inspire members), talented (interpersonally and organizationally), shared, committed to the setting and its members, and empowered.

**Setting maintenance and change.** Lastly, this domain, according to Maton (2008) was critical for the sustainability of the setting and included a focus on learning within the organization, including being responsive to environmental changes, bridging mechanisms which are used to deal with internal and external conflict and external linkages to resources and outside partners.

This framework can provide a useful heuristic to examine which features of an empowering setting facilitate the agency and its members to promote institutional change.

**Collaborative Efforts in the Response to Domestic Violence**

Collaborative relationships have received growing attention in the U.S. literature. They can take many forms like coalitions, coordinating councils, or task forces, and are often instantiated in order to promote changes at the systems and social levels (Allen, 2006; Allen, 2005). These collaborative approaches find their theoretical roots in various areas like community organizing, community development and citizen participation (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002). Collaborative approaches to social problems operate under the assumption that a comprehensive approach involving multiple stakeholders and actors can be more successful as opposed to a more fragmented approach (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002). In the U.S., domestic violence coordinating councils attempt to improve policies, increase communication across agencies, and create networks of services to provide comprehensive services to survivors of violence (e.g. Allen et al., 2008). Studies suggest that through various activities like identifying weaknesses in the system's response, providing training for key stakeholders, engaging in community education, and lobbying key stakeholders, coordinating councils can facilitate various outcomes like promotion of knowledge and institutional or systems change (Allen et al., 2008; Allen, Javdani, Lehrner, & Walden, 2012; Allen et al., 2013).

In contrast to coordinating councils in the U.S., which have played a critical role in providing leadership in coordinated response efforts (Allen et al., 2010; Pence, 1999), formalized structures like these have not yet emerged in the Indian context. However, preliminary efforts to coordinate services across agencies and engage in collaborative work can be identified (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). Civil society agents are becoming increasingly large actors in the response to VAW in India. Significant efforts are being made to increase collaboration between formal response systems like law enforcement and criminal justice and grassroots organizations or

research institutes as a way to improve services for women and increase the sensitivity in delivering services. For example, the Special Cells on Violence against Women (SCVAW), which are housed within police stations in Mumbai, aim to respond to the needs of women in a sensitive way through an alliance between trained social workers from an academic institution and the police force. Dave (2013) described the aim of these collaborations as providing emotional support, negotiating for non-violence with stakeholders, building support systems, engaging police help, accessing legal aid, advocacy, reestablishment of women's relationships with their economic assets, arranging shelter, and working with men in the interest of violated women (p. 1205). The Centre for Vulnerable Women and Children in Mumbai is another example of a collaboration between the state and an NGO, which provides counseling and advocacy services for survivors of domestic violence within a hospital setting. Another example of efforts from civil society to improve the formal systems response comes from the Lawyers Collective, a nongovernmental organization comprising of lawyers. The Lawyers Collective has played a key role in engaging in advocacy efforts to implement laws preventing domestic violence and was also responsible for proposing changes to the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (Bhatt & Ullman, 2014).

Studies on the formal systems response to violence against women in India suggest that there is a clear distinction between community-based women's organizations and other formal systems like governmental, medical, and law enforcement organizations. Specifically, women's organizations are more likely to offer sensitive services and engage in structural understandings of violence against women as a social problem, while formal responders from traditional agencies are likely to view the problem as rooted within the individual or the couple (Menon & Allen, 2018). Our previous study suggested that efforts at collaborations across criminal justice

and government agencies and women's organizations can be mutually beneficial and could promote systems change in the response to violence against women (Menon & Allen, 2018). Thus, it is likely that in the Indian context, grassroots agencies will be critical catalysts in stimulating needed change in the systems or institutional response to domestic violence.

## Present Study

Despite growing efforts to work with different agencies and sectors in the Indian context, little is known about what facilitates this process, or what outcomes are associated with these efforts. This study examined how a grassroots agency can aim to influence change in the systems response to domestic violence (i.e. functioning as an empowered setting) through efforts to work with different stakeholders in responding to domestic violence. Specifically, this study aimed to examine the activities engaged in by the agency related to potential institutional change processes, understand the aspects of an empowering setting and other processes that appear to be salient in helping to promoting institutional change, and examine the perceived outcomes seen as a result of the agency's efforts. This study aimed to understand this change process in a critical moment in India's history in which there is a rising resistance to violence against women and a call for more immediate and effective interventions to support survivors. While this study was focused on a specific agency and seeks to understand these questions within a particular setting, findings from this study can contribute to a larger knowledge on the effective response to domestic violence in the Indian cultural context.

## Results

Our results focus on the broad themes and sub-themes that emerged from our data as being relevant to perceived institutional change efforts by the agency. First, we describe various processes that emerged as being relevant to perceived institutional change efforts. These are

discussed through themes at the level of the organization, reflected in the theme of organizational factors that facilitate empowerment of staff members; and at the inter-agency level, reflecting relational capacity of the members and the agency. These processes appear to facilitate the organization's reputation and build social capital for the agency and its members. Finally, these processes along with the activities engaged in by the agency appear to be associated with various perceived outcomes identified in the data.

**Organizational factors facilitating empowerment of staff**

Various facets of organizational climate emerged as being critical for facilitating the empowerment of members to be change agents. These included effective and inspiring leadership, agency mission and a shared vision, shared power and decision making among members, and opportunity role structure.

**Effective and Inspiring Leadership.** All staff members described the organization's director as being committed to the cause of gender equality and as having developed a reputation in the community for her work and the agency's commitment to this issue. Additionally, all participants unequivocally described positive relationships with the director and with supervisors more generally. This was also evident from the observational data. For example, one staff member noted,

> This is a really good team to work with. Our director is committed to this cause. It is very easy to work with her. She says do the work – she is not controlling, she says do it legally, do it your way. The staff also have positive equations [relations] with each other.
>
> - Apoorva, female, staff member

The director of the agency was described by almost all participants as being inspirational and a role model. One participant compared her to a celebrity, "*For me, like it usually happens to*

*people if you tell them that there is some celebrity –when I saw her, I thought I wish I could work with her or be like her*". Participants also described the director as being supportive and available to all staff members, "*You always feel like you get that space from your leadership and leadership matters a lot. Our director believes in us and she's always been there, - she's never far away*". Participants saw their work, drive, and commitment to the cause as being closely tied to their leader's vision and commitment.

**Agency mission and shared vision.** In addition to effective leadership, participants expressed a shared vision for the agency and its mission, which was evident across interviews (*"[our mission is] Seeking gender justice in all aspects of living", "When it was established, its [mission] was women's rights and violence against women and it is doing that today as well*").

Many participants viewed the agency and its work as being committed to its founding vision and mission. For example, one participant described, "*the work we started in [founding year] is going on even today*." Another participant noted, "*What I like about this agency is that they started with the mission of helping people and they have continued with that mission over the years. They have never swayed*." This shared vision and commitment to their mission is likely to create a sense of trust in the agency and its work among the community and other institutions.

**Shared power and decision making.** Participants described the agency's structure as being largely non-hierarchical. For example, one participant noted, "*There is not much of hierarchy. So, you know even at meetings, everyone feels comfortable and says whatever they actually feel*." All participants acknowledged that their voice and inputs were always invited and valued ("*I really like working here and I do feel that what I say and my inputs are important.*

*Our seniors have so much experience and are always so helpful*."). Participants also described being comfortable disagreeing with each other and expressing dissenting opinions,

> Interviewer: Do you feel like people are comfortable disagreeing with one another?
>
> Tina: (laughing) Yeah yeah absolutely. That we do the most.

Another participant described this as involving discussion, characterizing their work as unorganized, but emphasizing that this was what was central to the success of the agency,

> There's lots and lots of interaction, a lot of discussion. I think ours is one of the loudest most chaotic organizations. The fact that we are unorganized has kept us honest. But that is why we can break many doors, which others would not even try to touch.
>
> - Rahul, male, staff member

In a similar vein, most participants talked about the agency's emphasis on youth voices, which was also seen in the importance given to interns and their perspectives. One participant noted, "*I think we always want to hear what others of different age groups think. I think that's very important to this agency, and it always has been*." Another participant echoed this belief,

> We put in a lot of faith in youngsters because [director] believes that youngsters are the ones who will bring the change. They have literally given the whole project in our hands. That doesn't just happen everywhere.
>
> - Poonam, female, staff member

**Learning orientation and opportunity role structure.** Another dimension of organizational climate that emerged as salient during the interviews was a culture of learning that was cultivated in the agency. For example, talking about gender sensitization, one staff member noted,

> (Laughing) I think gender sensitization is a lifelong process. Because we all come from a very patriarchal society, and it's very hard to unlearn what we have been taught. So that process goes on. With all honesty the most gender sensitized person is our director, and even she is learning every day.
>
> - Arti, female, staff member

Participants described how the agency facilitates learning and opportunity through varied roles that are available to staff members. Most staff members had worked in multiple roles and departments over the years. One participant noted,

> I started as a family counselor, but this organization has different divisions - we have training, research, media. In so many years, I've worked in every division. I have worked as a trainer, as a researcher - I have worked on female feticide – I have worked on creating awareness in the community, telling them about the law.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

Reflecting the smaller size of the agency, participants also described how their work involves them taking on multiple roles, "*While my official position is [position], but as civil society allows us to do, we wear many hats. So everything from cleaning the toilets to talking to the President, we play different roles*." This diversity in roles and opportunities available to participants is likely to provide them with a varied skillset, expertise, deep knowledge and familiarity with different areas of work of the agency, and ability to successfully work with different people.

**Relational capacity**

The following aspects of relational capacity emerged as being salient for collaborative efforts and institutional change processes in our data.

**Positive working relationship.** Participants described the agency's positive working relationships with other agencies and sectors of the formal systems response. One participant described their close working relationship with the government and the police,

> The fact that we perform for free case handling for the government, providing them reports [they appreciate it]. If the commissioner calls, we are there in a second – we do whatever he wants us to for gender for free.
>
> - Khushi, female, staff member

**Shared vision.** Participants described the agency's success with collaboration across agencies as being facilitated by the creation of a shared vision. This was seen by participants as being paramount to a successful relationship.

> Most of our local partners stick around with us because they respect the way we work, the way we treat them, and they agree with our work. Who do we work with? With the police? Of course. With the dominant organizations? Of course. Like minded NGOs - just like how we are working here for 25 five years whatever, so those organizations are also working so why not get associated with them. Work hand in hand.
>
> - Poonam, female, staff member

**Being a-political.** Another shared value of the agency and its members that was seen as influencing its relational capacity was the agency's emphasis on remaining a-political as opposed to being aligned with specific political parties. One participant described this as follows,

> Staying apolitical has helped [collaboration]. We criticize and appreciate every government. So it doesn't matter if it's BJP, Congress Aam Admi Party, Mayawati [Indian political parties/leaders]. We don't care who it is. Good work is appreciated, bad

work is criticized. So, it's a very thin edge, but we've managed to work the edge pretty well.

- Kiran, female, staff member

Another participant echoed a similar sentiment, stating that being a-political has facilitated coordinated efforts,

I think [we collaborate successfully] because we are not political - we're very politically neutral. We join hands together to work on a certain cause and don't like get into political issues. I think there are a lot of organizations which tend to take political leanings and that defeats the whole purpose. We don't take sides, but we are working for all.

- Priya, female, staff member

**Ability to recognize strengths in stakeholders and identify allies.** The agency appeared to have a focus on identifying strengths among stakeholders (e.g. police, government) and identifying potential allies in their work towards gender equity and women's empowerment. For example, one participant stated,

Working together needs a lot of patience and persistence. But something, which needs to be understood by us, the civil society, is that all sustainable programs have to be government programs in this country. I mean it's so big, there are so much resources required, so many you know, different agencies working together. You can do it for one or two, but there are like 60 thousand cases a day in [city name]? What about them? So yes, projects take longer, but all our reports first go to the government, before they even go in the public domain. All our conversations always involve the government. Because, through the last 30 years of experience, we've realized they are the only ones who can do it. One small change by them is a very big thing for the country.

- Rahul, male, staff member

This was further reflected in all participants' unequivocal positive attitude towards interagency collaborations and a commitment to further collaborative efforts across different sectors of the response to violence against women and gender equity issues. One participant stated, "(*Laughing) We haven't left any agency – be it police, lawyers, courts – we try to work with all of them. To all extents – right from the community to the court*." Another participant exhibited a nuanced understanding of different agencies and their strengths and drawbacks and commented on how a commitment to collaborative efforts is crucial for being recognized as dependable,

> Also understanding what are their [agencies'] lackings [sic]. Sometimes, the lacking is not that in that department, but another one. Then you don't push that department. So you need to understand the system and you need to go in with a blind eye that I have to make it work. Now hook crook doesn't matter. And after a small while they'll realize that these people are not in for the money, they will make it work and things happen.

- Rita, female, staff member

**Inter-agency respect and appreciating stakeholder and agency interdependence.** A final part of relational capacity included a respect for other agencies and stakeholders, and an appreciation for the interdependence between agencies for achieving social change This was evidenced by participants' statements like, "*At the end of the day, it's only the police that can catch a rapist. It's only the government which will rehabilitate the survivor*", and "*The work we are doing cannot be done without their [police] help. Their role is very necessary because when our counseling cannot do the job, then we have to take the help of law and order*". Another

participant described the importance of interpersonal respect as being important to the work of the agency,

> It is important to understand the ground realities. Be it the field where you're actually working, be it the field with the police, or with the politicians. There's that wonderful bridge that you have to build and there's that wonderful boundary which you never cross. Realize that, learn that, work with it. And mutual respect. Be it patriarchy, people respect that as well, be it a useless police officer, respect them as well, be it a corrupt politician. Because it's extremely important in this line of work that you know your capabilities, but more than that you should know your incapability. Okay, where will I fail? So I think that very simple art of balancing things has worked well.
>
> - Rahul, male, staff member

Relatedly, participants also expressed an understanding of politics and the importance of collaboration for success. One participant noted of the police,

> They are sometime lethargic, but sometimes really brilliant. I would not paint them or generalize them by any brush. They are as good or as evil as the civil society people. So I've come across and had the pleasure of working under great police officers, who have taught me a lot and who can understand cases from miles away, they just have a grasp on it. On the other hand, with some people it's harder – those experiences are there - but they are a very important part of social change in India.
>
> - Apoorva, female, staff member

**Activities**

The agency's commitment to its mission for gender equity and women's safety is evidenced from the different activities being undertaken by the organization and its members.

Archival data indicated that since the initiation of the project in 2015, 961 police personnel, 619 doctors and paramedics, and 15 out of 17 protection officers in the city were provided gender sensitization trainings. In addition, 859 meetings were conducted with local and district level stakeholders like police officers, chief medical officers, and *anganwadi* [rural mother and child care centers] workers. One staff member noted,

> I think something that makes us unique is that we have tried to understand all our issues with depth. We have a research division that tries to understand issues at their root, we have the training division that is doing gender training and focusing on gender equality, then media is doing campaigns to raise awareness. Our whole focus is how to widen reach, so I think that we do well. So we have research studies, we do capacity building, we do work focused on domestic violence and rape counseling. We also do lobbying and advocacy for gender sensitive laws and policies.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

This section focuses specifically on activities that were identified as being important for institutional change efforts.

**Stakeholder trainings and oversight.** The agency has a long history of conducting gender sensitization training with various agencies like the police, doctors and paramedical staff, local community governing bodies (called *panchayats*), and corporate agencies. One participant described the importance of this work as follows,

> It is really important to sensitize these agencies. With police, their nature is such that people get scared. So it is important to work together – how do you help women who come to you. You can place a woman constable, but even then you need to do trainings.
>
> - Khushi, female, staff member

Archival data provided examples of information that was conveyed during these trainings. One of the meeting notes on training with paramedic staff on gender sensitization and domestic violence stated,

> Participants were told about the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act and of four facilities for women within the act (shelter, custody, maintenance and protection). Participants were told that women were provided a lawyer free of cost. It was emphasized that women do not know of these rights, so they do not use these facilities. It is therefore necessary to spread awareness. Various participatory exercises were conducted to raise awareness about gender sensitization and discrimination.

Archival data also indicated that one of the common training exercises used by the agency involves giving participants a blank page with a box and asking them to make whatever they wanted of it, which most often resulted in participants writing things in the box. Facilitators use this exercise to point out how women feel constrained to stay within the boundaries of the box.

In addition to trainings, participants described their agency as providing oversight to various boards or agencies.

> With the sexual harassment committees and other committees, they usually have an NGO as a watch group so that work happens well, so many places invite us to be the NGO. Even when the workplace sexual harassment guidelines and laws were being created, all of us and other NGOs were central to that process, working together to give feedback. Now with all sexual harassment committees, you have to have one member from an NGO. So many of us are part of multiple committees.
>
> - Rita, female, staff member

**Identifying strengths and weaknesses in systems and advocacy efforts.** Another important role played by the agency, especially in their work with other stakeholders and agencies, is in its identification of strengths and weaknesses in the systems working to meet the needs of women. While identifying strengths in the response appears to be important in inter-agency collaborations, identifying weaknesses was seen as an important step that helps the agency engage in systems level advocacy efforts.

> We have maintained a lot of transparency where if there is something wrong anywhere we will not support it. If we feel somewhere that the police is doing wrong, we try to explain to them. There our objective is not that we accuse them, [but we discuss] how can it be changed. So that with our networking and their networking, what improvement [can we bring] in society. They also know that these people are working in society with absolutely no profit, and our objective is never that I show myself as right and the person in front in any way as at fault that their work is wrong. Yes where their work is wrong we absolutely stand before them and say so, and if you are right then we are with you.
>
> - Rahul, male, staff member

**Interface meetings.** One of the key initiatives of the agency was to create interface meetings between various stakeholders and the general public. These meetings were designed to allow staff members to bring common concerns expressed by community members and women that they worked with, to the respective stakeholders.

> We do the interface program in each community once or twice a year. So in that the community and whatever public servants we have – or stakeholders as we say [all come]. So doctors, lawyers, police, politicians, all come. So we, the public and the stakeholders,

we get them face-to-face. We put the problems before them – what are the problems and they can give them solutions – in public.

- Poonam, female, staff member

**Key mechanisms of influence: Organizational reputation and social capital**

Importantly, our data highlighted organizational reputation and social capital as important mechanisms that facilitate the agency's position in promoting institutional change.

**Organizational reputation.** Our analysis revealed the importance of organizational reputation in creating successful collaborations and facilitating institutional trust in the agency. Staff members perceived the reputation that their agency (and the director) had established over the years as being pivotal for their successful work with different stakeholders,

I think our director and our work has a huge role in this [coordinated efforts]. We have been here for the last 30 years and our director has a very good, very strong network.

- Apoorva, female, staff member

Additionally, the agency's use of a unique and innovative approach that meets the community's needs over the years was identified as being crucial for building a reputation for itself.

The biggest thing is that the objective with which we came - even if not 100%, we have been very successful by 80%. Even today when we go for any work, even if our office was there 10 years ago, even today when we go people recognize us, many people come and walk with us. Even today they say you people come again, open counselling centers here again. We started with the issue about women and domestic violence, but today we are working in every aspect of gender – we are working with children also, we are working with youth also. The objective we had that women should have the knowledge

about their rights and the law- that we feel that to a large extent – we have managed to achieve that.

- Kavya, female, staff member

**Social capital.** Related to the organization's reputation, the agency's longstanding work in the community has enabled them to build on social capital that facilitates collaborative efforts. Both interview data and observational data found support that the agency's work has also facilitated institutional trust in the agency, which might relate to its social capital. One participant described this as the agency having "*built a mark in the community*". Another participant described of other stakeholders,

> The fact that they [police and government] know that we do the work, that lets us have a lot of freedom with them. Okay, these guys are criticizing us. But tomorrow when push comes to shove, they'll be the ones standing with us. So building that rapport with them has helped.

- Priti, female, staff member

Another participant described how the director's reputation has helped the agency and its members' social capital,

> [Director name], I'll say it openly and all my employees also know it, is the only reason we have not been beaten up within police stations is because we come from [director name's] organization. And it's a no-nonsense organization. But this image - to keep it for 30 years, through thick and thin, is very hard. And she has maintained it. And because of that, doors open for us. So that, I would not say we have a great methodology, we just, sometimes it's just one person who ensures things get done. So she's that person for us.

- Khushi, female, staff member

## Perceived Outcomes

The long history of advocacy and promoting systems change by the agency appears to be associated with the following perceived outcomes that were identified in the interviews and through observations.

**Increased knowledge among stakeholders.** First, the initiative taken by the agency to engage in collaboration with the government and criminal justice systems appeared to have been associated with perceived increased in knowledge among these systems about the work of the agency, and about gender related issues. For example, archival data from one of the stakeholder training meetings stated, "*Some police staff asked for material about the organization and publicity posters for putting up in various places*". Meeting notes from the archival data provided various examples of issues that were discussed during training meetings like the impact of domestic violence on children, the meaning of gender, the difference between sex and gender, its impact on personal and professional life, and resulting crimes from this like rape, sexual harassment at workplace, domestic violence, eve-teasing, and lack of justice received from formal responders because this is seen as a domestic issue. Observational data as described in an example below showed that other stakeholders valued and invited this knowledge.

> The counselor reported that she had to leave the center early because of a meeting with the [city] police. The agency had been invited by the [city] police to talk about issues facing women at different life stages (e.g., birth/infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood). The counselor reported that the [city] police were likely to create an agenda for women's empowerment and safety based on the recommendations of the agency's team. The counselor and the head of development attended the meeting.

While not having formally assessed outcomes on gender sensitization, it is likely that the training workshops conducted by the agency also lead to increased knowledge among stakeholders about gender issues, with an increase in skills related to delivering sensitive care to survivors of violence. For example, archival data on meeting notes provide several examples of instances where participants demonstrated such knowledge of gender issues at the end of the workshops. For example, one meeting note stated, "*Participants spoke of their own experiences and described the need to change gender discrimination*". Another stated an example of one participant who said, "*all participants should take a vow that they will not practice gender discrimination in their own houses, so that change begins at home*". Other meeting notes had similar themes. For example, one meeting note stated that one of the police officers stated that he would contact the agency for any domestic violence case that came to him and asked for additional information about the legal aid available to survivors of violence so that he could inform women who approached him. Another meeting note included participant contributions to the discussion where one police officer had described the importance of gender sensitization in schools and colleges since "*they are future citizens of the country*".

**Creation of inter-agency networks.** Second, the agency's reputation and its efforts at engaging with different agencies appears to have helped with the creation of a large inter-agency network, which facilitates referrals of cases to the agency and conversely assists staff members in providing targeted referrals to survivors who come to them. During observations, one counselor reported to the researcher, "*For example with doctors, they know how to identify that domestic violence is happening, but they didn't know where to refer cases. Now after our trainings, they know where to refer cases. So now hospitals where we did trainings refer cases to*

*us. ASHA [refers to 'Accredited Social Health Activists' and are government community health workers] workers whom we trained refer cases*". Another participant stated,

> Different providers and stakeholders gradually came into contact with us through various things. Like we are involved with some Commissions [boards], so sometimes lawyers who are in those start liking our work and become associated with us. Many departments associate with us when we do trainings with them. We have also been involved in passing different laws and policies through advisory committees that we are a part of.
>
> - Apoorva, female, staff member

While staff members described the importance of gender sensitization trainings in improving services for women, they also described how this process facilitates the creation of inter-agency networks.

> These trainings are also good because they create knowledge about [agency]. So now we get referrals both nationally and locally. So even hospitals and police where we do training refer cases to us. Or when cases are solved, they tell other people who then come to us.
>
> - Rita, female, staff member

Not only do these networks assist the agency in obtaining referrals, they can further utilize these networks when attempting to help survivors.

> We are associated with the police, and many lawyers, who do voluntary work, or advisory work - they associate with us. Or in the legal aid cells, there are many such lawyers who are involved with us. When we work with really poor women – these lawyers fight their cases taking smaller fees.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

Another participant noted,

> The whole networking and creating relationships with the different stakeholders really helps. So when there's a survivor of domestic violence, she knows that she can go to this lawyer. And a lot of these lawyers and police officers - because like we've had very long-standing relationships many of them - offer free counseling. Because we have long term contacts with the police, we know which police station is available at which time, which women constables will be responsive, so we can contact them accordingly.
>
> - Arti, female, staff member

This was also seen in the archival data. For example, one meeting note indicated, "*Police officers were asked for information on the beat constables in their area so that they can be approached in case of any problem*". Another meeting note stated, "*The SHO [Station House Officer – referring to the officer in charge of the police station] was very cooperative. He attended the training along with 36 staff, introduced the agency members, and said they themselves also train school girls in self-defense in areas where crime occurred. We informed them about the center's work in domestic violence. We told them that we work along with police, doctors, anganwadi workers, lawyers and the community, and asked them to refer people to us for counselling*". Observational notes further corroborate these results as is seen in the following excerpt from observational data,

> The counselor just debriefed me following a networking event that she attended. She said that the agency had received an invitation for a networking event with police officers to see how NGOs can work together with police more effectively. The counselor reported that representatives from the Special Cell for Women and Children, along with the ACP and DCP [Assistant Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police] were

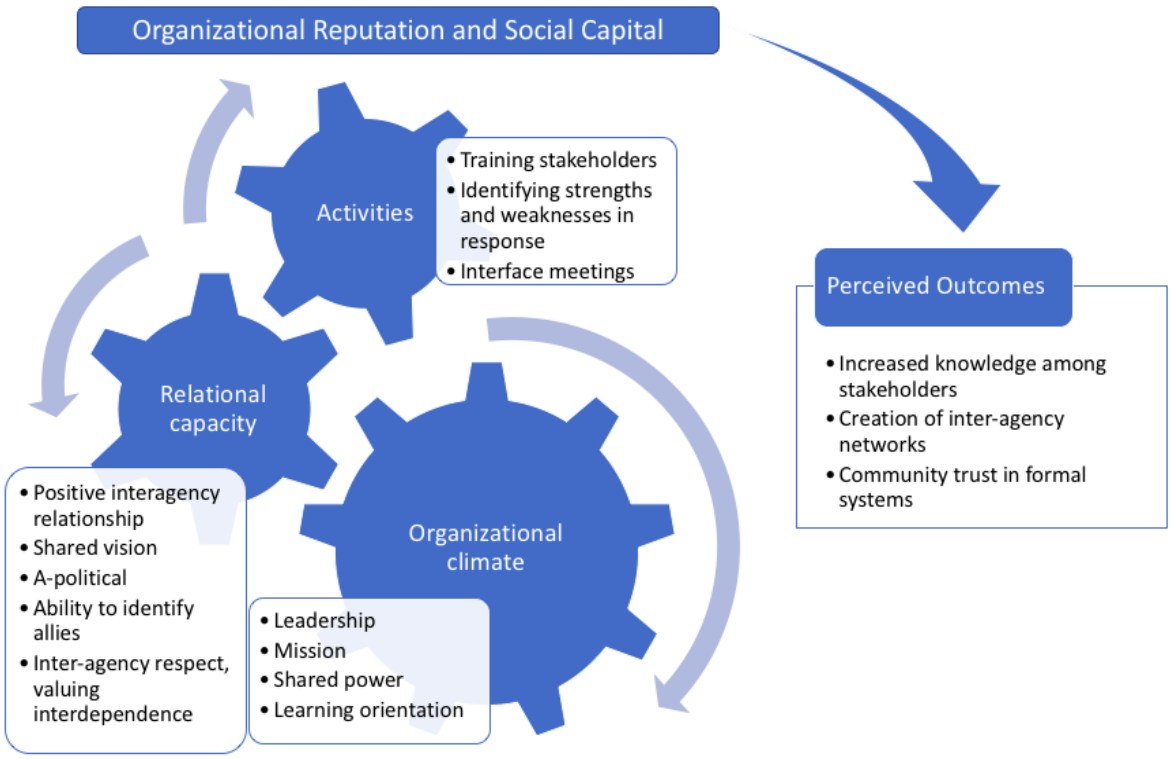
present. She said that various problems in the community were discussed, and the counselor provided examples of times when their clients had encountered challenges while approaching the police. The counselor that this was an important meeting and appreciated the effort made by all the members present at the meeting, stating, "We need to find ways to work together so that my community members will feel empowered to approach the police".

**Community trust in formal systems.** Lastly, the agency's efforts appear to be working to re-establish community trust in formal systems. One way that this appears to be directly addressed is through the interface meetings which are conducted in a public domain. One participant described this process as follows,

> We put the problems before them [stakeholders] – what are the problems and they can give them solutions, in public. In a way their image also gets developed, that they have come to the public, they have listened to their problems. Many times the SHO [Station House Officer – referring to the officer in charge of the police station] and all give their personal [phone] numbers, the lawyers are giving their personal numbers. The MLAs [Members of Legislative Assembly – elected representatives] are giving their numbers, that 'here we are bringing this scheme you will get it soon, and if it doesn't happen, these are our numbers you can contact us directly'. So this way we all sit together. When you do community work with no self-interest, people start coming along with you.
>
> - Khushi, female, staff member

In archival data, this was described as follows, "*the community was familiarized with authority figures and the issues faced by them were discussed in the platform provided*".

Figure 5.1: *Mechanisms facilitating collaborative efforts and institutional change, and perceived outcomes*




The model described in *Figure 5.1* was the last phase of our analysis, where we created a pictorial representation of our codes to understand the process through which the agency's efforts facilitate collaboration and institutional change. As seen in *Figure 5.1*, elements of the organizational climate and relational capacity, in combination with the activities conducted by the agency appeared to be associated with several perceived outcomes related to inter-agency collaborations. In addition, our analysis identified organizational reputation and social capital as important mechanisms of influence in enabling the agency to push for systems change.

## Discussion

The present study highlights various mechanisms that appear to be salient in facilitating a grassroots agency's ability to situate itself as a leader in instantiating institutional change in the response to domestic violence. While this study is not focused on measuring actual systems-change outcomes, it provides important insights for settings that aim to function as empowered settings. Our study found evidence for various efforts to work with different stakeholders. Additionally, the agency's efforts to engage in institutional change and collaborations appear to be associated with several perceived outcomes related to improving services for survivors of domestic violence. Specifically, this study highlights perceived outcomes of increased knowledge about stakeholders about the agency and gender issues, creation of inter-agency networks and referral systems, and community trust in formal systems. This study provides a comprehensive example of how institutional change may be fostered through collaborations across formal systems like criminal justice and law enforcement, and grassroots agencies.

Our study found support for the organizational framework of empowering settings (Maton, 2008) as being important for empowering staff members to act towards institutional change. This study providing preliminary support for how empowered settings and empowering settings may share common features. Our study found that aspects of the organizational climate, specifically, leadership, the agency's mission, shared power, and a learning environment or opportunity role structure were identified as salient by staff members for facilitating the agency's work. Indeed, studies in the U.S. have demonstrated that these facets of organizational climate have been found to be associated with empowerment of members (e.g. Maton, 2008). By fostering staff members' empowerment, these aspects of organizational structure and climate may facilitate the creation of empowered agents, consequently enabling the agency to promote

systems change in the response to domestic violence. Research in the U.S. supports this assertion, with studies showing empowerment of members and these organizational factors as being important for collaborative efforts (e.g. Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002; Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996; Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Powell & Peterson, 2014).

Importantly, our study highlighted key facets of relational capacity, or facilitators of inter-agency collaborations. Relational capacity was characterized by positive interagency relationships, a shared vision, an emphasis on being a-political, being able to identify allies, and valuing interdependence among agencies. These facets of relational capacity may be intricately tied with aspects of the organizational climate, highlighting some key ways in which aspects of an empowering setting can be salient for promoting collaborative efforts.

For example, a non-hierarchal organizational structure that values shared power may facilitate replicating similar structures in inter-agency collaborations. Participants from an agency such as the current one may express greater comfort with shared power and shared decision making in collaborative relationships. Indeed, aspects like shared power and collaborative decision making have been found to be important for collaborative relationships (e.g. Alexander et al., 2003). Other studies have highlighted the importance of shared leadership for successful collaborations (e.g. Bailey et al., 2011).

Further, a learning orientation fostered by the agency may facilitate agency members' ability to appreciate diverse perspectives and successfully work across different agencies. This may also be a key factor in helping staff members appreciate inter-dependence of different agencies and foster respect among staff for different stakeholders. Indeed, studies on collaborative efforts in the U.S. suggest that key to the success of the collaborative efforts in the inclusion of a diverse array of partners and stakeholders (Bailey et al., 2011). Further, aspects of

relational capacity identified in this study like being able to identify allies, recognize strengths of different stakeholders, and appreciate interdependence of agencies for social change efforts have been recognized in previous studies as key for collaborative efforts (e.g. Bailey, 2011).

Facets of the organizational climate like clarity about the agency's mission and a strong belief in it many facilitate collaborative efforts by helping agency members to identify allies that are aligned with their vision. Indeed, the importance of clarity in goals and a shared mission has been identified as an important predictor of success of collaborative endeavors (e.g. Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

Many of the factors that have been identified in the present study as facilitating collaborative efforts have been supported through previous research in the U.S. For example, Foster-Fishman et al.'s (2001) comprehensive review of critical elements of collaborative capacity highlight the role of positive attitudes towards collaboration, positive inter-agency relationships and a shared vision. In addition to these factors, our study highlights the importance of being a-political and adopting a strengths-based approach in working with stakeholders. This strengths-based approach allowed members to identify strengths among agencies, identify allies, and respect interdependence across stakeholders; which were important in promoting collaboration.

Data from the present study suggest that the agency engaged in various activities to promote institutional change like training stakeholders, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the systems response, and conducting interface meetings targeting different stakeholders. This study suggests that these activities appear to assist in increasing knowledge among stakeholders and creating inter-agency networks. Data from the U.S. also suggest that collaborative efforts

play a pivotal role in generating knowledge about programs and in facilitating relationships across stakeholders (Allen, Watt, & Hess, 2008; Lasker & Weiss, 2003).

Along the same lines, this study also suggests that the agency's activities may play an important role in promoting institutional change through stakeholder trainings aimed at delivering more sensitive services and identifying and publicizing the strengths and weaknesses of the systems response, which might call attention to gaps in the service delivery process. Additionally, the agency's activities, particularly through their emphasis on interface meetings that include public attendance, emphasize transparency in the systems response, and create bridging social ties, bringing together players that may not previously have interacted, are likely to facilitate community trust in formal systems. This appears to be an especially important outcome to target in the Indian cultural context that is characterized by a silencing of violence and a distrust in formal systems (e.g. Menon & Allen, 2018).

Finally, our study was able to identify important mechanisms of influence that appeared to be important in facilitating the perceived outcomes. Specifically, we found that the agency's reputation and the social capital built by staff and the agency as a whole appeared to be crucial for enabling the agency to engage in collaborative work. It is likely that the agency's consistent work in line with their mission facilitates institutional trust in the agency. Previous studies corroborate these results by finding support for the importance of trust (e.g. Nielson, 2004; Vangen & Huxham, 2003), reputation or legitimacy (e.g. Gray, 1985), and social capital (e.g. Kadushin, 2004) for collaborative relationships.

This study provides a preliminary model for explaining some of the key mechanisms that may be central to facilitating institutional change in the response to domestic violence in India. While this study was rooted in a qualitative analysis of the processes adopted by this specific

setting, quantitative studies done in other settings have found similar processes at work (e.g. Maton, 2008). Specifically, this study suggests that facets of organizational climate and relational capacity along with the activities of the agency promote the agency's reputation and create social capital for the agency. This study particularly highlights the role of inter-agency work as a potential avenue for institutional change. Our study's emphasis on understanding the process of institutional change by examining collaborative efforts was well suited to the context within which the study occurred, where collaborative efforts were only recently emerging. While our study highlights preliminary perceived outcomes, future studies could attempt to obtain more comprehensive measures of effectiveness of these collaborative initiatives. Longitudinal studies may be well-suited to examine changes in some of the outcomes highlighted by the study.

A key limitation of this study is that our data were confined to staff members from the setting under study. While this helped us understand how this setting approached coordinated efforts, it is vital for future studies to incorporate perspectives from other stakeholders to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the processes and outcomes related to coordinated efforts in the country. A mixed-methods approach that incorporates network analysis can assist in understanding the structure of collaborative networks. Another limitation of the study is its emphasis on interview data from staff members, who may have been motivated to reflect the activities of the agency in a positive light. While we used observational and archival data to further inform our results, this limitation needs to be noted.

Despite these limitations, this study suggests that such collaborative efforts may be an important site for promoting systems change in the response to domestic violence and provides a preliminary framework that can guide future research. By creating inter-agency networks across formal systems and grassroots agencies, institutions can potentially improve the sensitivity

through which services are delivered. Such collaborative efforts are also likely to increase access to community resources for women who experience domestic violence through the facilitation of inter-agency networks. Further, by creating venues like interface meetings for getting feedback from stakeholders and community members on the systems response, and building transparency in the functioning of systems, agencies are likely to engender trust from community members while facilitating systems change. This is likely to be a key to facilitating help-seeking and disclosure of abuse in a cultural context where domestic violence is largely silenced.

# CHAPTER 6:

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Domestic violence in India is a growing concern. This has been found to be perpetuated through an Indian culture that normalizes the violence (e.g. Biswas, 2017; Menon & Allen, 2018), making efforts to intervene or respond to gender-based violence particularly arduous. Thus, the response to domestic violence in India needs to be transformative in nature, supporting the empowerment of survivors of violence, while also focusing on facilitating changes in community norms on domestic violence. Community psychology has had a long-standing interest in understanding and promoting empowerment among individuals and communities (Rappaport, 1987). Empowerment is a strengths-based concept that describes both a process and an outcome that promote local capacity and aim to promote positive outcomes (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013). Various studies have highlighted the importance of settings like grassroots organizations for promoting empowerment of members (Aber, Maton, & Seidman, 2011; Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011). This study builds on this body of research to examine the ways in which a grassroots agency fosters shifts in community narratives in the response to domestic violence in India by empowering community members to be agents of change. Specifically, this study examines the mechanisms involved in empowering community members to respond to domestic violence in their community and fostering the creation of counter narratives that may fuel changes in the community response to domestic violence.

A large body of literature has attempted to examine contexts of risk for Indian women. In particular, studies have tried to differentiate the effects of rural versus urban living. For example, based on data from the National Family Heath Survey for India, Ackerson and Subramanian

(2008) found that rural women were at higher risk of experiencing domestic violence. However, Kimuna et al. (2013) reason that this finding may be attributed to rural living being associated with poverty and gendered or orthodox traditions that may exacerbate domestic violence. Attempting to understand these findings from a cultural perspective, it is likely that women from urban backgrounds may face higher pressures to veil their experiences of violence due to fears of shame or stigma. Thus, both individual level factors and community norms and patriarchal influences exacerbate the risk for domestic violence among women in India and affect women's willingness to engage in help-seeking following victimization.

Community beliefs and norms that support domestic violence are likely to negatively impact women's help-seeking efforts, with fewer avenues for support. Highlighting the importance of cultural beliefs, studies on domestic violence in India have found that tolerance of domestic violence in the community and justification of marital violence is associated with higher risk for perpetration of domestic violence (Begum et al., 2015; Kalokhe et al., 2018). Indeed, a host of studies have found high levels of normative acceptance of domestic violence among both men and women in India. For example, Jejeebhoy (1998) found that domestic violence was condoned in traditional or orthodox communities. 93% of women in this study believed that domestic violence was justified in certain circumstances - like neglecting housework or disobeying the husband – and reframed the violence as an act of reprimanding the wife (Jejeebhoy, 1998). Other studies similarly suggest that women in India view domestic violence as justified in a myriad of instances including burning the food, being inadequate in their care for children, refusing sex, showing disrespect to one's husband or in-laws, using contraceptives without the husband's permission, practicing infidelity, or leaving the house without permission (e.g. Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005).

Thus, intervening to interrupt and prevent violence against women requires not only support for survivors and efforts to facilitate their empowerment, but also shifts in the community norms and community response to such violence. One way to understand cultural norms is by examining community narratives. Narratives create meaning and impact human behavior (Rappaport, 1995). Community narratives that are shared within a community can provide an important means of detecting changes in norms. According to Rappaport (1995), community narrative "tell us not only who we are but who we have been and who we can be" (p. 796).

The emphasis on community change in support of individual level change has long been emphasized in community psychology. For example, Rappaport (1995) wrote, "people who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a new communal narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story" (p. 796). Thus, in order to create a sustainable change, individual empowerment of survivors of violence (Study 1) needs to be accompanied by shifting community narratives. Indeed, our research on the formal response to VAW in India (Menon & Allen, 2018) suggests that in addition to dominant narratives of patriarchy reflected through themes of victim blame in the response to VAW, there is an emerging presence of counter narratives reflecting social change efforts in the current systems response. Some of the themes identified in our study included a growing discourse on the issue of VAW and increased mobility and financial independence among women. This is therefore a crucial time to shift the discourse on VAW and frame this as a social rather than an individual issue.

## Community Organizing and Empowerment

Grassroots organizations that focus on increasing community members' engagement with social issues and promoting citizen participation are an ideal site for studying community organizing efforts. These settings can also be understood as a community resource that allow people to share stories and provide opportunities for personal growth and community participation (Trickett, 2011). Thus, grassroots agencies can play an important role in facilitating social change by providing opportunities for community organizing.

Community organizing has been described as a process through which community members take collective action regarding social issues of mutual concern (Christens & Speer, 2015). Community organizing has been studied as an important process that promotes community capacity, systems changes, positive human development, and civic engagement (Christens & Speer, 2015). Christens and Speer (2015) describe the growth of community organizing as being a response to social trends towards isolation and civic disengagement seen in society. This can be a particularly important move to combat deeply entrenched cultural norms against disclosing violence against women in India (Menon & Allen, 2018) and can facilitate counter-narratives that see domestic violence as being a social problem, as compared to the current perception of domestic violence as a private issue (Menon & Allen, 2018).

While grassroots community organizers most often aim for goals of community or systems change, they also facilitate changes at the individual level, evidenced through higher levels of empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1995), increased social capital (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005), sense of community (Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2013), and collective-efficacy (Ohmer, 2007). Indeed, a large body of literature has examined empowerment at the individual level, called psychological empowerment. In contrast, the literature on community

empowerment appears to be scarce, despite a push for understanding empowerment at multiple levels since the late 1980s (e.g. Rappaport, 1987).

Given the influence of community participation on promoting empowerment (e.g. Christens et al., 2011), organizations that promote community organizing can also be understood as empowering settings. While growing attention has been devoted to understanding the nature of empowering settings (e.g., Maton, 2008), few studies have examined how such settings can influence the broader community and facilitate social change. For example, in Peterson & Zimmerman's (2004) conceptualization of organizational empowerment, the extra-organizational component, which is most salient for understanding the social change efforts undertaken by a grassroots agency or an organizational setting, has received the least attention and only includes the processes of community action and dissemination of information.

Few studies have examined how a grassroots setting can facilitate community empowerment and lead to social change efforts in the response to domestic violence. This study seeks to understand how a grassroots organization operates within a patriarchal space (with dominant cultural narratives of patriarchy, see Menon & Allen, 2018) to push levers and stimulate change in the community response to domestic violence through the creation of counter-narratives. Specifically, the study seeks to examine what activities the agency engages in related to shifting community narratives and empowering community members to be agents of change, what mechanisms or strategies adopted by the agency are salient for shifting community narratives, and how these mechanisms differ at the individual versus the community level.

## Results

We first sought to understand the context within which this agency was operating, in order to gain a nuanced understanding of community norms prior to the agency's social change

efforts. Observations and interviews corroborated that silencing of violence was experienced as being a significant problem in the community, particularly before the agency's involvement ("*They say that women should be educated, but even after being educated, few women come forward with the violence*" – Amit, male, community member). Participants attributed this silencing to lack of "courage" and awareness among women ("*The main problem is that, they do not know about themselves. If there is violence, then they do not know themselves, they are trapped. Their courage is low, since women have so much pressure on them [oppressed]*" – Rahul, male, community member); an acceptance and normalization of violence ("*My mom said look child you have to bear some things, this is the fate of women, these things happen in all marriages, you have to bear it – it's okay*" – Suman, female, survivor); the cultural sanctity of marriage ("*My father used to say, she's a girl – she may be unhappy but girls are best in their in-laws' house – she should stay there*" – Pooja, female, survivor); and community pressure towards silencing ("*If something happens in the neighborhood too, they cannot go forward, because there is so much pressure from others to keep it quiet*" – Rohit, male, community member).

Participants also described the lack of support from women's families that creates additional barriers to disclosing violence, ("*She can fight these things if she receives support from her family. But after marrying, she doubts if her family will stand by her. She has to think a lot about what will happen to her family, her children. She stays concerned about how her family will view her. Men can still remarry after getting a divorce, but women still do not have the freedom to do this."* - Arjun, male, community member; "*Somewhere along the way, to go forward, they need their family and community support*" - Karan, male, community member).

Next, we sought to understand the activities engaged in by the agency and the important mechanisms at the individual and community level that facilitate shifts in community narratives. The agency's work in the community, evidenced through their community actions, and their emphasis on community engagement appeared to be salient in facilitating several mechanisms related to shifting community narratives.

**Community engagement and community actions**

The agency's centers are physically located in the same local community. This is illustrated in the following observation notes from my first visit to one of the centers and describes the community that the agency is engaged with.

> After getting out from the subway, I took a rickshaw to the center and we were driving through extremely narrow lanes. There were no roads, the "roads" were ruined with the rains, and were full of ditches, puddles and bumps. It was like riding on a roller-coaster without a seatbelt. I watched as the rickshaw driver navigated through narrow lanes, avoiding bumping into water coolers, people sitting outside their houses, cars, cycles, and tractors. The houses were built so close to each other that the "roads" often went in between rows of houses facing in each other, such that it felt like we were driving through people's front "yards". The center had two rooms and a kitchen and was in the center of the village. The electricity kept going off constantly and the counselor and co-counselor were using plastic fans to keep themselves cool. The counselor reported that this was a slum area a few years back, and conditions were even worse than they were currently. She said, "You must have seen while coming, there are no roads also to get here – it used to be worse". She reported that it used to be less developed and that the village where the center is located is marked with obvious disparity in social status and

backgrounds. The co-counselor reaffirmed this by saying "Half of the village is developed and half is poor. So half of the people have big *kothis* [mansions], but then there are migrant workers that come here and live in *chawls*." The majority of people here, according to the counselor, work in factories. The village is surrounded by plastic factories, where women also form a major part of the labor force. The counselor reported that women may be illiterate, but they still work in the factories. In many families, the women reportedly are the only earning members. The men use country liquor leading to many problems with alcohol and domestic violence. Many women travel further to neighboring towns to work as house-help to make ends meet.

The agency engages in extensive community-based work evidenced through various activities conducted by staff members like door to door surveys in local communities that aim to document abuse, raise awareness among households about domestic violence, and raise awareness about the agency and its services. Additionally, the agency conducts regular community meetings to increase awareness about domestic violence, gender-based issues and women's legal rights. The agency also facilitates efforts to create local leadership groups with men, women and youth. Archival data indicated that the agency had conducted meetings with 24,364 women and 15,340 men through community meetings.

> We teach women about their rights and laws. We work with both men and women in the community. We also have a youth group in the community. We do a lot of work in the communities. So in slum areas and all, they have these groups or panchayats [community governance groups]. But even the panchayats don't know the laws. So we are also doing training with them so that they don't commit injustice. We are also doing other awareness building exercises like street plays with children. We participate heavily in the 16 days of

> activism. We see that most men are willing to join if it has happened with their sisters or mothers. But now its become more serious. Crimes are really increasing. It's still treated as a family matter though. It is not given any importance – so we work on changing those social norms.
>
> - Priti, female, staff member

Staff members described an increasing emphasis in the agency on involving men in their social change efforts.

> We started the men's group because it always happened like the women victims - we help only them – but then a need was felt that the one who survives this if we only do it for them then maybe it won't be so effective, we should also do it for those people who somewhere are involved in the violence. So we started making groups of the men also – so those men who used to oppose us – they also started associating with us. We also started trainings with local panchayats [community governing bodies] and including them in our groups. Because if there is violence happening in one house, and if 5 men have sat down to take the decision about that, then they will take the decision according to their thinking - they won't implement anything anywhere that may require a man to bow down, so we are saying that where the men have erred, the pressure should be put on him, only then will violence stop.
>
> - Rita, female, staff member

Archival data provided information about the activities used to engage community members. In one meeting, facilitators led discussions on questions like, '*what is women's status in society?*', '*what is women's status in the family?*' and '*do men and women have equal opportunities to work outside the home in our society?*' Additionally, this meeting used several

vignettes to facilitate discussion like, "*Amit is married to Sushila since 6 years and has made her undergo 4 abortions because of wanting a son. Should he do this to his wife?*", and "*Today Rani's husband abused and slapped her because he didn't like the food. This is a daily thing. What should Rani do?*". In addition to working with community members, the agency works extensively with survivors of violence. Archival data indicated that 651 cases of domestic violence were registered with the agency since 2015. Of these, 272 (41.8%) cases resulted in reconciliation and 242 (37.2%) cases were provided with legal services.

The agency also appears to adopt a relational approach in their work with community members. This appeared to facilitate the creation of support and trust, rather than emphasizing distance and hierarchy between the agency and the broader community. For example, one staff member noted,

> We live in the same area as them, so that makes a difference. Women feel that we will go to the center in this community itself and tell madam their story. So this way on their own level, sitting down with them on their own level, drinking water in their own house - so first of all the barrier that is between us, we try to take it away. So they don't feel that this is madam [someone superior] who has come from outside. [They feel] She is sitting with us, she drank water, 'come let's have some of your tea' - so they feel that they can openly share the whole story with us. Government agencies can't do the same, they sit in an office - if you go to them fine, if you don't it's fine, they are getting their salary.
>
> - Neeta, female, staff member

Staff members emphasized a non-hierarchical approach in community meetings and appeared to know the community members and their families well. This was also corroborated through observational data during one of the community meetings,

> Amit took us through narrow lanes behind various houses to the area where the community meeting was to be held. Various women and young boys came out of their houses and greeted the counselor and co-counselor as we went through the slum, saying things like, "*Didi* [elder sister] you haven't come and visited us in so long! Come inside and have tea, come home" In turn, the counselor and co-counselor asked them about their children in some instances, and about other family members in other instances. After the community meeting, the boys took us to show us their organization and set up for a local religious function. They showed us their set-up with a lot of joy and pride, telling me how much time they had spent preparing for the event and sharing details about the program in the evening. They also shared the food they had got for the function with us and wanted to take pictures with us near the event.

Interviews with survivors also highlighted the relational approach adopted by the agency. For example, one woman talked about the close bond she had built with one of the counselors, calling her "*Didi*" or elder sister,

> She considered me a sister - we had a relationship – we had become like relatives. So when I have no one, this sister is there or this mother is there. There was so much love between us – any little thing that happened – [I would think] I'll go meet *Didi* – any small thing happened – I'll meet *Didi*.
>
> - Payal, female, survivor

Importantly, staff members expressed a deep knowledge of the communities that they were engaged in, along with an appreciation for the complexity of the community needs. This was also evidenced during participant observations of agency members' interactions with

community members and other stakeholders. One participant described how this facilitates openness in the community towards their programs,

> I think people are extremely open because our projects are humble and most of us who go to the field have been taught, have learned and believe that we know nothing about the field as compared to the person living there. So all the projects are extremely flexible.
>
> - Rahul, male, staff member

A key part of community engagement was seen by staff members as being related to having staff members from the local community,

> Our offices are made of local people. That's a very big difference. So it's not somebody like myself going from [site A] to [site B] and trying to train. The core team is who lives there. So people know that you understand what is the situation, because you are living in that situation. And always, the people going in the field are told to have larger ears and smaller mouths that listen more, and talk less.
>
> - Apoorva, female, staff member

Together, the organization's community engagement and activities in the community appeared to facilitate several mechanisms that were important for facilitating counter narratives of change. Our results will focus on the agency's work at two levels: the individual level and the community level.

**Individual Level**

At the individual level, the agency's community engagement appears to provide survivors as well as community members with knowledge, skills, and resources; opportunities for community-based participation; and opportunities for leadership.

**Knowledge, skills, and resources.** The agency's activities like community meetings appear to increase community members' knowledge, skills, and resources. Archival data from the agency provided various examples of the kinds of knowledge that was imparted to community members. These records indicated that the agency facilitators discussed the work of the agency, the difference between sex and gender, the difference between marital rape and acquaintance or stranger rape, emotional abuse as a form of domestic violence, and other gender-based issues. Specifically, with respect to domestic violence, archival data indicates that the agency informs community members about the five types of cruelty that constitute domestic violence (physical, which is commonly known; but also emotional, dowry-related, marital rape - discussing the issue of consent, and economic cruelty). Meeting notes from one of the meetings provides a specific example of the agenda for these meetings,

> We started with introducing the agency. [Staff member] asked all boys and men present if they knew about the reason for the meeting, then talked about domestic violence, gender discrimination, eve teasing, and informed them about domestic violence act. [Staff member] asked how many boys helped their sisters and mothers in housework, for which only 4-5 boys raised their hands. This was followed by a discussion on gender-based issues. One female member said that men should also talk about the atrocities against women happening in society. [Staff member] answered that the agency has organized many awareness programs for men just for this purpose. Then they talked about gender discrimination, stating that discrimination starts at a young age and girls bear the consequences of that. While girls should demand their basic rights, this is possible only if they become aware of their rights.

All community-based participants and survivors were able to reflect on different ways in which the agency had facilitated their personal growth and development through the acquisition of new knowledge, awareness of social issues, and skills as a result of their engagement with the agency. One of the male youth members stated that their formal education only taught individuals about the skewed gender ratio, but the agency was able to provide them with a more nuanced understanding ("*we only knew gender as a ratio. We did not know what gender was, or what sex was"*). One of the older community members, who was also a local *panchayat* [local governing group] leader in the community, reflected on his learning in the following way,

> I have been helping the community from the beginning – since the last 20-25 years. But when madam [counselor] came here, I learned about things I didn't pay attention to before, like domestic violence. I used to think it was just meddling in other people's problems.
>
> – Hari, male, community member

Another youth group member stated of his own growth,

> We were not open-minded at first. Our mentality was such that we saw women as different. As, soon as we joined the NGO, our mentality changed and we gained more respect for women. We learned what respect is and how to respect women. We learned about domestic violence, and what we could do. We learned a lot about these things.
>
> – Suraj, male, community member

Women in the community also described how the agency's work had facilitated knowledge about women's rights and legal protections ("*As much as I know now, if an awareness program ran like this, then people will be much more informed about their rights and women would not be trapped*" – Seema, female, community member).

**Opportunities for community participation.** The agency also provided community members with ample opportunities for community participation. Participants' narratives reflected that their community participation was also associated with a sense of community responsibility.

> I have been linked to them for a year, a year, and a half. Ma'am came to call me over. There was meeting. I had some interest in the meeting, so I joined. Then I went with ma'am to another community when there was a meeting there. I also came to help the community. People just think of themselves, it is also important to think of the community. Yes, to move your own life forward, you would have to do your own work. But even animals take care of their children – our community should change, so we have to do something. So, thinking about this, I moved forward [with agency]. I like learning about all this stuff.
>
> – Aakash, male, community member

During one of the community meetings, the male youth members described how they continued conducting their own meetings even after the agency lost funding to support their meetings,

> We have activities like plays in the neighborhood – we did one on the importance of educating girls. We do whatever we are able to. Before that, our mentality was different. We hold meetings together every two weeks and discuss different issues. The main problem is that our culture is very lazy. We know that women are always being pressurized by men, but we never try to change it. There is a big reason why we are not developing in this particular area.
>
> – Nitin, male, community member

Another male youth member described his growing interest in social issues as a result of his engagement with the agency and discussed how it fueled his desire to initiate meetings in the neighboring slum community, following the success of meetings in his own slum community,

> My interest really grew and I decided if no meeting is being organized by them, then you make your own meetings. So we made a meeting camp in an alley. In the evenings if we have time, we go into someone's place have meetings to discuss issues. These issues ranged from talks about septic tanks to harassment of women. I also do my own meetings, on every Tuesday I do my own meetings in my own place and discuss these issues.
>
> – Yash, male, community member

**Opportunities for leadership.** By providing community members with opportunities to associate with the agency (for example, through the Men's Leadership Group, the Women's Leadership Group, and the youth groups), the agency is able to provide members with opportunities for leadership, personal growth, development, and skill-building.

> I have been part of the Women's Leadership Group for many years. I first came to this agency when I had a case – I was experiencing problems with my husband. With *didi's* [elder sister, referring to counselor] help, I could leave that situation. So then I became part of the agency, and I try to help other women and bring them to *didi*.
>
> – Sita, female, survivor.

**Community Level**

The agency's work facilitates several community-level processes. Specifically, the agency's community-based actions facilitate capacity building within the community, appear to

increase social capital among community members, and help make the break the silence around the issue of domestic violence.

**Capacity building.** Interviews, observations, and archival data highlighted the emphasis the agency placed on creating catalysts of change in the community to expand the resources available to survivors of violence. One of the staff members reflected the agency's core belief in the importance of capacity building in order to facilitate social and community change,

> The idea is to create lots of catalysts. We very well know that our little projects are just a drop in the ocean. But the hope is that every community member takes on some of this, and creates some change of their own and then in the next 20-30-40 years, they make a larger impact
>
> – Rahul, male, staff member

Another staff member echoed this belief,

> See what I like best is that we are able take the woman from within the same community and train her. Because see, suppose that we are working in 8 areas, we are not able to go to all the 8 areas; so those women whom we have trained, they can understand the pain of that woman and get legal aid for her. If nothing else, she will call the 100 number [police] that there is violence in this one's house, she is facing injustice. And 'where are you speaking from?' – 'I am a member of [agency] speaking'. So they feel that I have this right. So I like this very much that at the least we have prepared the woman to stand up against the violence against her and also to help others to do the same.
>
> – Neeta, female, staff member

A similar value expressed by members of the agency was a belief in de-institutionalizing social change and facilitating social movements among community members,

> I think what is important is taking the movement back to the people. I don't know why, but in India, I have the feeling that it has been taken away from the people and put into institutions. If you can charge the people, you don't need so much to be done from your side. You know, micro-philanthropy which starts literally from your own heart - that needs to come back.
>
> – Priya, female, staff member

Thus, the agency emphasized creating capacity and empowering community members to be agents of social change, which was also reflected in the agency's actions in the community.

**Social capital.** Through a long history of engagement with the community, the agency is able to facilitate community members' social capital by promoting the creation of networks of interpersonal relationships among community members, and with the agency. For example, the boys in the youth group described how their work had recently been publicized in a television interview that got them recognition among peers in their community who were not previously associated with the agency,

> Youth 1: After seeing us on TV, they became interested and want to join now too.
>
> Youth 2: Yes, there are a lot of boys who were impressed by this and thought this was an admirable field. They showed a lot of interest and said, hey, how did you do that, I want to get involved too.

A staff member described how women's engagement with the agency and positive survivor outcomes facilitate help-seeking among other women who also get associated with the agency through the survivor,

> Slowly the chain is formed. If they get justice they come here and take membership with us and get linked with our organization. If she is staying in the same community, she tells

her friend, “see, for so many years, I was suffering but when I went to [agency] and got associated with madam, today I have got justice. You also come with us – there is a meeting”, so then she comes. And then in the meeting we give them information about law, about what laws are enacted related to women, and this law that has been enacted will give us justice. So they become prepared to fight not just what happened to them but they also come for the injustice happening against their daughters.

– Neeta, female, staff member

**Making domestic violence public.** Directly combatting a culture of silencing of the violence experienced by women in the community, the agency engaged in community engagement efforts like public community meetings during which issues related to domestic violence in the community were discussed by facilitators, and community members were invited to share their own stories, or stories related to what they had heard others experiencing. In addition, the agency conducted door to door surveys, which involved going to community members’ homes and talking to them about what constitutes domestic violence and sharing resources about the agency’s work and the ways in which they can help women experiencing violence. A crucial step achieved through these community-based efforts was bringing domestic violence into the public sphere and inviting community members to acknowledge this as being a relevant social issue in their community. The following notes were taken during a community meeting with women in a particular slum area where the counselor was educating women about the agency, and about domestic violence,

Counselor: Our organization works on women’s issues. By issues, I mean what her rights are, what her laws are. Okay? If I find out that this is my right, I can do this work, only then will I be able to do some work, right? Now, say it’s me, it’s my house, it’s my

family, it is my right to live here. If not, what happens? Some fight, argument happens, and what does he say? Get out. Does that happen, or not?

Various women: Yes, it happens, it happens, it happens.

Counselor: Even after 25 years of marriage it can happen? But the law says that where you were married off to, however much the husband has rights, the wife has full rights in that house too. Okay?

Various women: Yes.

Counselor: I am talking about those who have domestic violence occurring. Women don't want to say it, but every one of three women somewhere is struggling because of this.

Various women: Yes, she is struggling.

Counselor: Whether it be from fighting and beating, whether, say, if I say that I have no money in the house, that is also a type of struggle.

Various women: It is a struggle.

Counselor: Because to me, when my family is made, there is a vow, there is a vow in marriage, that I will take care of the house, and the husband will earn and bring home money. He does earn and bring the money, but he spends it on himself. At that time, the vow is broken. Then it comes upon us, that we have to take care of the home, and on top of that we have to earn money somewhere and bring it home. Even after that, when he comes home in the evening. Then, there is that pain that while we are evenly handling the home's burden, then why is there violence against me? There are laws made to stop that violence. Don't think that he hit me this much because he loves me, so it's no problem. The way that if I slap someone outside, then there are consequences in the law, in that

way if there is violence in the home, there is a '*dhara lagu*' [law applicable] in that too. Do you know what '*dhara'* means? Law. Have you ever seen - the father never punishes his son – He never says that his son is wrong. But many times women don't have that backup. Do they? Tell me do women have a force behind them? It takes one minute and that unity is broken. The time in the in-law's family that wrongdoings are being committed against a woman, if even one woman stands by her, the next day, somewhere, that struggle comes a little lighter. Does it come, or not?

Various women: It comes.

Counselor: So, we have to keep this unity. Haven't you heard the saying - Women are women's worst enemies. The father-in-law punishes less, the mother-in-law punishes more. The brother-in-law says less, but the sister-in-law says more. We at least need to see these things more, that at some point we came as someone's daughter-in-law, so this love that is between us, should stay that way. Because someone else's daughter is coming. And your daughter is also going into someone else's house. We need to think about this.

**Mechanisms of Social Change**

The agency's work appears to facilitate several processes at the individual and community levels. Our analysis suggests that the processes described above were related to four central mechanisms that facilitated social change through counter narratives.

**Individual level.** At the individual level, these included an increase in individuals' critical consciousness, and empowerment of community members.

***Increased critical consciousness.*** The agency's work on providing community members with knowledge, skills, and resources and allowing for opportunities for participation and

leadership appears to lead to an increase in community members' critical consciousness. Participants described gaining a greater understanding of gender issues, of domestic violence and harassment faced by women, and of the importance of supporting women and their empowerment ("*At first, I did not know what domestic violence was. I did not know how to behave with girls. How I should try to empower them forward, instead of pushing them back. So, these things changed"* – Amit, male, community member). For example, one youth member expressed the following demonstrating his growing awareness of gender socialization,

> I want to give one example - at some point we will get married. In the coming time, when kids come, if we have a son, we give them a bat and ball to play with, and if it is a girl, we give them a doll or some soft toy to play with. In a way, women are mentally suppressed from the beginning. Boys go outside and play and girls are mentally and physically suppressed. In this way, people's mentality increases. As it increases later on, moms start saying, daughter roll up some *rotis* [bread] while your brother goes out to play.
>
> – Bharat, male, community member

Another youth member described how their own socialization led them to accept whatever their parents and community norms suggested,

> Because what I saw in society, what my mom and dad told me, I used to run with that. That, yes girls wear what clothes I decide, [but now I think] why should I decide that? What right do I have? The right everyone has received, girl or boy. But for girls, wearing clothes, going out, who gives me the right to decide? [who gives the right] to society? I got awareness about that. I was the same before – I was an educated boy, but I had no knowledge on gender or women in parliament. Because whether it is my group, or even I

went somewhere, some lady from NGO used to come in the community and we used to catcall her. Slowly we came to learn, that okay, that this was bad, then we learned a bit, and gained knowledge.

– Krish, male, community member

Another male from the community meetings described how he tries to be cognizant about the division of labor and responsibility within the household, and described appreciating the importance of educating girls,

What happened before was that for tiny, tiny things I became angry. I changed myself. Like she used to be working, I would tell her to bring me something. Like, she is washing clothes, now I do it myself. Before, I used to see if she would bring it or not, now I do it myself. I am trying to teach my children this too. My daughter is in twelfth grade right now. She wants to do medical, and I feel proud.

– Jatin, male, community member

***Empowered citizens.*** The agency's work and its empowerment agenda appear to facilitate the process of empowering community members. This includes women who are survivors of violence who may be empowered to take action against their perpetrators, be self-reliant, or be and able to access resources or achieve the goals that they set for themselves (see Study 1 for details), and bystanders or individuals in women's social networks who may be empowered to engage in social or community action related to domestic violence. A survivor, Payal, reflected on her decision to become a permanent member,

With what I have been through, when any sisters come or any daughters come or anyone comes to me, then I can't bear their unhappiness. So since I have got help from here so I

also try to help them. From there I bring them here, like see this is their problem and they should get some help.

– Payal, female, survivor

Participants provided examples of how the agency's activities led to creation of support systems for survivors in the absence of the agency's active involvement,

The biggest thing I believe is when the women ended up having their own meeting and they would tell other women about the legal act for domestic violence, and it helped other women. So that was a big achievement for our society. They began the meetings with uneducated women, and that was great because no one talked about it before.

– Krish, male, community member

Staff members reiterated this,

Without the NGO women don't know, like if there is violence, what should I do. Now you find out you can go to the police. So, it is able to give them a bit of courage, but without the NGO I think that they are not able to realize it. Like, where I should go for my rights, my laws.

– Savita, female, staff member

The process of empowering survivors to be self-reliant was also observed during the agency's counseling sessions

Counselor: But I had told you, how will you stand on your own feet? You will have to think about that too. Now, mom and dad allowed you to work, right?

Shikha: Yes. I will start this job now.

Counselor: Before it wasn't like that, right?

Shikha: No, before *papa* had said no. You talking to them really helped, so now they have agreed that I can work.

Counselor: Making you stand on your own feet in the most important thing. So, this is a very slow change, but you have survived so much for so many years. Now you are slowly seeing change and your parents are also understanding this. So that is improvement.

Shikha: Yes, I explained it to my mom, and my mom explained it to my dad. He didn't even want to put in the case. He was thinking that everything could be resolved on its own.

Counselor: And your dad took you there himself today?

Shikha: *I* took him there.

Counselor: I see. This is a very good thing, that you can take your father there, and that you feel confident about it. That is very good.

**Community level.** At the community level, mechanisms of change included an increase community trust, cohesion, and ownership over the agency's work and mission, and increased capacity for informal social control.

***Community trust and ownership.*** The agency's community actions and the processes at the community level appear to facilitate a sense of community trust in the agency and promote social cohesion among community members. Additionally, interviews and observations corroborated a sense of community ownership in the agency and its work. Community members appeared to view themselves as being part of the agency, often introducing themselves to the researcher as "*I have been associated with [agency] since.*.". For example, one youth member introduced himself as follows,

Prakash (age 22): As soon as I entered the organization, I become deeply involved and then I had become permanent. So I have been a permanent member of [agency] since the last 3 years.

Interviewer: Okay, so what is the meaning of 'becoming permanent?'

Prakash: Being permanent means that whenever there was a meeting, I used to willingly go, and I was also responsible for helping to organize meetings. I also try to help in whatever way I can with programs and discussions in my slum related to gender.

Similarly, community members also appeared to take it upon themselves to convince other community members about the mission and work of the agency ("*If people believed in the organization, then all of society could understand the importance of gender issues*"). Participants described how the community gradually developed trust in the agency. Various participants described an initial distrust and wariness towards the agency's work.

Earlier when these meetings took place, then people thought, 'okay the home-breakers are here', now they know that they are wrong. From our area, many cases have been solved through this agency – many that people in our community have given them. After some time, the older people came there too, attended the meeting. In their homes they saw these types of thing, violence, or whatever they saw, then they opened up. They were closed off before, but then they started opening up. When they started trusting, they started talking openly, and new cases started coming.

– Nitin, male, community member

A staff member also corroborated this in her own reflection of the agency's journey in these communities as follows,

> We often went to some communities where there weren't even proper roads to walk on, we wouldn't get place to sit. We often sat on roads, in slum areas and conducted meetings. Meaning if we said we had to sit, we would sit on newspaper. Women would come together there when we were conducting our awareness programs. We had a lot of difficulties in settling [establishing] ourselves there. If we look at that period of 2000, then the men, the old women or the old people – they used to say see the home-breakers have come. But now we feel that the area which we have left and come [community where an old center was shut down], we know that the women there are very well aware. Even from far away making a 10 km trip, however they can, they are still coming here to us – they are bringing cases. If they have the need then like we used to teach them that no you go to the police station - so today they are going to the police station – for themselves, and for the women around who are being victimized - they are taking them also to the police station. They are guiding them themselves, like 'see just saying it verbally is not enough, give it in writing and then take a receiving from them'. This is awareness, which we wanted, that it should reach the common woman. So it feels very good that those areas where now whether there are counseling centers or not – but women are aware. And those men, who at one time used to say that these people are home-breakers or if you listen to them too much, our wives will get ruined, now the same men are bringing the cases of their sisters and daughters.
>
> – Neeta, female, staff member

***Capacity for informal social control.*** The agency's emphasis on building capacity within communities, together with opportunities for participation and leadership, promote the community's capacity for informal social control and intervention. Thus, rather than

institutionalizing the response to domestic violence, which comes with its own barriers, the agency's work facilitates informal community-based interventions.

> I am a very old member of [agency], since the center was being made here. So when cases come and Madam is not here or the center is closed, I tell them about what they can do and try and help. Before, I couldn't talk about these things either. Now, I am saying them myself. So, sometimes Madam is not here for two days, or three days. So, whoever comes, I listen to them, write down their complaint, take their phone number, and have them talk to madam. Then when madam comes, she talks to them. For everything else, I try to explain it to them myself. If we can find a solution here, then okay, but otherwise I show her the path to the police station or court. So now women know they can come here and sit.
>
> – Vivek, male, community member

A youth member described the following,

> I try to talk to my friends about their role if they see violence. So, I said like, if there was violence happening in your home or your neighbor's home, that you should make noise. Go and make noise, so that they don't concentrate on them [the women]. Like ask for something, an excuse, so that the violence is lessened a bit, and they know you saw or heard them.
>
> – Kabir, male, community member

Women who joined the local leadership groups were also able to reflect on what they had learnt through their association with the agency, and how they were able to help other women in the community.

We learnt if suddenly there is some violence being done to us, then what should we do, or what is the role of the neighbor. From the neighbors to the relatives – what is the role of all of them, we learnt all these things. And if a law has been passed in that, what facilities are provided in that for women, and where will they get those facilities, we give them information on these things. Like okay if you can't get 100 [number for police], then call 181 [number for women's helpline].

– Ruhi, female, community member

Community members also appeared to believe that the community had improved in its ability to combat crime or violence,

Krish: Women at least know more about their rights. The men here too, have stopped indulging in their vices as much. They have started to go away from that

Jatin: Yeah, we do not need the police as much. We don't see police that often here. But, there are cases where calls come, and police come.

Most of the survivors who were interviewed had been referred to the agency by a neighbor or friend who had previously been associated with the agency and had a positive experience from it. Payal described how she found out about the agency following threats from her in-laws to leave the house,

There was a girl in our neighborhood - she told me, 'for how long will you bear all this – there is an organization, you go there. Over there, whatever you tell them, they will help you'. She told me, 'don't let them [in-laws] scare you – this is your right, even their fathers [a phrase used to describe a right] can't throw you out'. So, I said my *namaz* [prayers] and went to *Didi* [elder sister, referring to counselor].

– Payal, female, survivor

**Counter Narratives and Social Change**

Various community narratives of change were identified in the interviews and observations. We termed these counter narratives, given that they could be contrasted with dominant patriarchal narratives. While we recognize that social change is a gradual process, we were able to identify narratives that indicated shifting norms around domestic violence and the response to violence. Acknowledging the gradual nature of social change, one youth member stated,

> Before [agency involvement], women were not very independent. Either with their own decisions, or with working outside the house. Even my uncle used to say, 'I won't let the women in my house work, you go work instead'. And right now the situation is that my aunt is going to work (chuckles), so today, his wife is the one that works. Today, there is some violence that still exists, but more people don't accept it. In our type of society, things will slowly change, they are slowly understanding there shouldn't be a need for a slap. These things are decreasing slowly, so slowly there will be less of it.
>
> – Nitin, male, community member

The different themes reflecting shifting community narratives are described next.

**Awareness and discourse on gender issues.** Participants' narratives demonstrated an awareness about gender related issues and an interest in generating discourse on these issues. For example, a community member noted,

> It's this backwards mentality - even if it's the man's fault [referring to violence], it is the women who are lectured. Women are pushed down [oppressed], saying that what has happened has happened, and it won't happen later. And after lecturing, the matter is

suppressed. But we all have to say, no this is wrong. We need to involve boys like how we are doing now.

– Rahul, male, community member

Another community member reflected on changing community attitudes about the importance of educating girls,

There are many uneducated families. When the NGO opened up, they weren't sending their girls to school. They are not educated themselves, and they don't send their girls. Now, more girls are going to school. I have seen this since the office opened up.

– Krish, female, community member

These perspectives on growing gender-based awareness were corroborated by other women in the community. For example, one of the youth member's sisters commented,

I think my brothers have changed a lot since these meetings. I have seen them change for the better since they joined [agency]. They help me in my work and support me. Like, if my parents do not let me go somewhere, or talk to me about how I dress, they support me, and say how come you ask her but you don't say it to us. My parents have also changed because of that.

– Sima, female, community member

**Supporting empowerment of women.** Participant narratives also demonstrated an acknowledgement of the importance of empowering women, often referred to as "*giving her courage*", and the role of the community in supporting women's empowerment. One youth member noted,

It is just that we have to give birth to some courage in woman, but they can't do it alone. [we have to create awareness] That we have an NGO here, that if something happens she

can come here. But, we have to support them to give rise to this courage. From my perspective, this is the most important

– Yash, male, community member

Another youth member described the following with respect to educating girl children,

I tell mothers in my neighborhood - if you are getting education for free, why would you take your daughter out of school? The only thing is that the mentality kind of stops here, that after some time their education stops. Those things are changing a bit now. When the meetings [community meetings] began, the girls were in 10th or 11th grade, today, those girls are doing a nursing course instead. [Girl name]'s parents used to come here, her mom and dad used to come, to the meetings. And 2 or 3 years ago when she passed the 12th grade, I was sitting down talking to her mom, and to the girl, and I asked what she will do after graduating. So she said sewing and embroidery. I said well sewing is old, what new thing will you do? The best part is that now she is planning to do a nursing course. So if something were to happen tomorrow, she can stand on her own feet and do some sort of job. I did not believe that her parents would do that. I thought they would marry her off, because they were from my village. And they took this step – this is how this change is taking place.

– Arun, male, community member

A female community member corroborated this perspective,

I think women are a little bit more firm about what they see their future as. I think before that they were not given like a window to look out of. They were just told like you have to get married. But now they know that they have somewhere to go to, that if something like this happens again, they can approach these guys.

– Alia, female, community member

**Acknowledging domestic violence as a social issue.** Staff, community members and survivors were able to reflect on changes in their community, such that there was gradual acceptance of domestic violence as a human rights or social justice issue rather than an acceptable part of marital life. Staff and community members were able to provide examples of how this perception had changed in their community. One youth member explained,

> At first it seemed that this organization is dangerous. Society thought that it breaks apart people's homes because it only listens to women. It is very difficult explain equality to society. I learnt that the law is one-sided. It is one-sided for me [biased towards men]. Then slowly the elderly women also started sitting in the meetings, they started coming. Why did they start sitting in? When they saw what was happening in their house, with their daughters in their in-law's houses. Or, at some point they thought 'okay, this is wrong' - at some point they felt that. Whether it was their daughters, or their daughter in-law, at some point they thought, well in my house, in my in-laws, in the neighborhood, this thing is wrong.

– Amit, male, community member

Another youth member contrasted this knowledge with his prior belief of poverty being the sole social justice issue of concern,

> I did not even know about [domestic violence] laws, I only knew about poverty. When I went forward [with agency], I learned more, attended more meetings, learned about the Domestic Violence Act. I did not even know that if someone was outside my door, if my neighbors were beating their wives, even if inside my house someone beat my mom, I

would think that it was right. I did not understand that as violence - I thought it was right. That right, when I realized it was wrong, I became more informed.

– Vivek, male, community member

Survivors of violence who had received assistance from the agency were also able to problematize domestic violence as a human rights issue, "*After coming here I have gained a bit more confidence. Now, I don't see things getting too bad. I feel that I won't have to suffer through much more torture. If something happens and I have to take that step, then I will absolutely take it. Things have gotten to be too much. I don't want to face much more and this is my right. So if something happens now that I will not step back*.", "*I've faced this myself, so I'm talking about it, the ladies don't know what kind of torture they are facing. Saying slanderous lies about us, saying awful things to our families, so a lot of things affect us mentally. We should absolutely tell others about this. This is a right too, that no one can mentally torture us*."

**Supporting disclosure of domestic violence.** Participants also expressed support for disclosing abuse, and a growing willingness to disclose abuse.

The main thing is that, if some struggle is happening with the woman, like violence, be it a woman or girl, she needs to discuss her problem. Whether it be with a friend, or a neighbor, or an NGO, she should not stay quiet, and instead, should discuss her problem.

– Sara, female, community member

One youth member contrasted this with a pre-occupation with keeping the family intact,

When there is violence occurring, women push down their frustration, to make sure their child's future is not ruined - thinking about what would happen if they separate, how will they give their child a good future. But people are slowly realizing these things - that if they are keeping them down [oppressing women], it is only their loss. You do not profit

from that. It is just a loss. I can give an example. There is an aunty in the neighborhood. There was a lot of violence in her home. Her husband used to come in their home, drinking beer, and used to beat the kids. She grew tired of this, and we spoke to her and told her to call the police. So one day the police came to their house. So then, something must have happened. The police must have explained things to them. Now, she knows about her rights, and what she can do.

– Krish, male, community member

A community member attributed this increased willingness to the agency's presence,

Since this place has opened, there are still a lot of differences in the women. There has been some awakening of the strength here. At least to talk and say she is having this problem - she comes here to talk. She has started talking.

– Sara, female, community member

**Supporting intervening with domestic violence.** The agency's engagement in the community which includes meetings where issues related to domestic violence are discussed in a public domain, and the involvement of community members who acknowledge domestic violence as a social problem appears to create social norms that promote intervening in cases of domestic violence. This is likely to play an important role of creating networks of support for women in the community. One of the female community members described her role as a community member of the agency as one that facilitates her ability to intervene in cases of domestic violence,

The work that [agency] does – I learnt that I don't have the right to tell someone what to do but I can guide two parties to reach a mutual decision. We only want awareness for them. We want the troubles inside them to go away. Any community members [leaders]

we make, we give them the message that we should never hear the complaint that you took advantage of their [women's] troubles. But we can help people raise their voices.

– Mira, female, community member

Community members also described feeling empowered to intervene when they see violence happening in their community,

I feel like I have some power too. Like if I see violence is happening somewhere, then at least I can explain to them that they can come here. Wherever it happens in the area, I know that I am connected to this place.

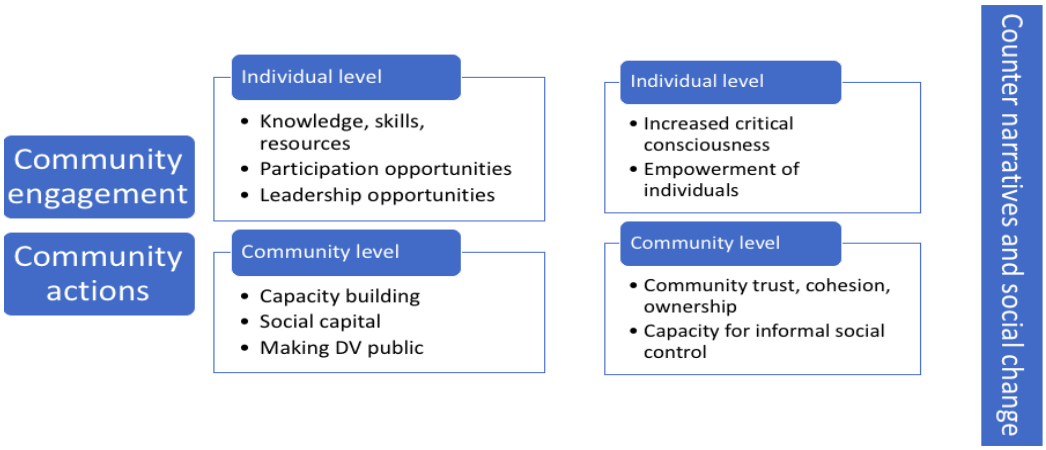
– Amit, male, community member

Another participant provided an example of intervention,

One time there was an act of violence in front of me, in my neighborhood, even I was not able to raise my voice. I'm happy that my neighbor's son, who was four or five years younger than me, raised his voice. He yelled from far, to stop the fighting. And the violence stopped because of him. And really, it stopped. So I think now we are becoming more aware.

– Arun, male, community member

Figure 6.1: *Mechanisms facilitating the creation of counter narratives and social change*



The model described in *Figure 6.1* was the last phase of our analysis, where we created a pictorial representation of our codes to understand the process through which the agency's activities foster the creation of counter narratives and facilitate community change in the response to domestic violence. As seen in *Figure 6.1*, the organization's emphasis on community engagement, and their community actions together act at the levels of the individual members and the community. At the individual level, these lead to increase in knowledge, skills, and resources, and opportunities for participation and leadership. At the community level, the agency's work leads to capacity building, increasing social capital among the community, and making domestic violence public. These preliminary outcomes lead to mechanisms of social change at the individual level through increased critical consciousness and empowerment of individuals, and at the community level by enhancing community trust, cohesion and ownership, and capacity for informal social control.

## Discussion

This study highlights how a grassroots community-based intervention facilitates intermediate changes at the individual and community level, which in turn help to facilitate social change in the response to domestic violence. Specifically, at the individual level, this study found that organizational activities that provide opportunities for community participation and leadership and increase individual members' knowledge, skills, and resources appear to be salient in increasing individuals' critical consciousness and empowering them to be agents of social change.

By providing community members with knowledge, skills, and resources, and opportunities to enact them, grassroots organizing efforts can facilitate community members' ability to take collective action with respect to different social issues. Specifically, with respect

to domestic violence, by advancing participants' understanding of gender-based issues, and helping participants acknowledge their ability to influence social systems, the agency may help members adopt more systemic understandings of social issues, which can then provide the motivation to engage in social change issues (Christens, 2010). These findings parallel research on community organizing in the U.S. For example, studies have linked participation in community organizing with increased psychological empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1995), new understandings of the world, strengthened commitment to civic involvement (Christens, 2010), and greater likelihood of engaging in community and civic affairs (Speer et al., 2010). Further, providing opportunities for civic engagement, like those described in this study, has been found to be associated with higher levels of collective efficacy and collective action (e.g. Ohmer, 2007; Speer & Hughey, 1995).

A unique part of this organization's approach to social change was its emphasis on community level of change along with individual change. Systems change efforts have often been criticized for overemphasizing either the individual or the systems level (Christens, 2010), without attending to the other. In contrast, the present agency's approach appears to acknowledge the interdependence of individuals and communities in social change efforts. At the community level, the agency's work leads to capacity building and appears to increase social capital among the community. Studies in the U.S. have similarly shown that community-based participation is associated with building capacity for social action and provides opportunities for community members to build relationships of trust and reciprocity with others (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Ohmer, 2007; Speer & Hughey, 1995), referred to as bonding social capital (Perkins et al., 2002; Putnam, 1995). Bonding social capital, in turn, has been found to be

associated with increased levels of collective efficacy (Ohmer, 2007) and action (e.g. Welzel et al., 2005).

Our study also found that preliminary community level outcomes are associated with mechanisms of social change at the community level by enhancing community trust, cohesion and ownership, and capacity for informal social control. Studies in the U.S. corroborate these findings, demonstrating that grassroots organizing efforts lead to building a sense of community and cohesion among members (e.g. Peterson & Reid, 2003; Rappaport, 1995; Rossing & Glowacki-Dudka, 2001; Speer et al., 2013), and broadening participants' networks of relationships (Christens, 2010).

In addition to these processes, the agency's actions serve an important purpose of making domestic violence public, fostering the narrative of domestic violence as a social rather than a private issue. This is an important part of the agency's distinct approach that emphasizes an increase in capacity for social control as a way to promote social change in the response to domestic violence. Thus, community organizing efforts of this kind target the social isolation that prevents people from understanding their shared self-interest with others (Christens, 2010). This is particularly important in the Indian cultural context, especially with domestic violence, which is largely seen as a private issue and where silencing of the violence is the norm (Menon & Allen, 2008). Thus, by taking an approach to community organizing that makes problems public and builds networks of relationships among community members, such grassroots efforts can help to empower communities to enact social change. This emphasis on making problems public is also seen in other community organizing models like the Pacific Institute of Community Organizing (PICO) model.

By generating awareness among community members, creating spaces where women's stories can be shared, and building networks of support among community members, the agency may be able to promote interventions that interrupt violence, or provide support to survivors when needed. Understood from a social disorganization theory perspective, communities with poverty and neighborhood disadvantage have been found to have higher rates of crime (Sampson et al., 1997). In contrast, community-based participation including community mobilization efforts and social cohesion can promote communities' ability to regulate neighborhood crime (Sampson et al., 1997). However, unlike other forms of crime, domestic violence occurs in a largely private sphere, making it harder for community interventions. Thus, while cultural norms regarding the acceptability of violence may make women more reluctant to disclose violence, activities like these may make survivors of violence perceive the community as supportive or capable of mobilizing resources, thus facilitating disclosure of violence and help-seeking. Indeed, studies show that the capacity for informal social control is negatively associated with domestic violence (Browning, 2002). Further, many domestic violence prevention efforts, particularly in developing countries, have adopted similar approaches focused on community mobilization that challenge the social and cultural norms perpetuating domestic violence (e.g. Gibbs, Willan, Jama-Shai, Washington, & Jewkes, 2015). Such approaches focused on community mobilization have shown promising results in low-income settings (Ellsberg et al., 2015). Thus, by fostering collective efficacy, grassroots efforts like the one described in this study can lead to reductions in crime (e.g. Browning et al. 2004; Sampson et al. 1997).

This study highlights a model of social change in the response to domestic violence that works on individual and community level change in the hope for broader social change by emphasizing citizen participation, community mobilization and capacity for informal social

control. By engaging in capacity building efforts that facilitate the creation of local change agents, the agency is likely to create a supportive community for survivors of violence. Additionally, this work is likely to recast domestic violence as a social issue demanding intervention, and reduce the acceptability of domestic violence, rather than reinforcing a silencing of violence.

Given that most of the literature on empowering settings has focused on individual or organizational levels of empowerment, an important contribution of the present study was its focus on how grassroots agencies can instantiate social change at the community level. Importantly, this study points to important mechanisms of social change at the individual and community levels that can be examined in future studies. For example, future studies adopting a longitudinal design could examine the impact of enhancing the capacity for social control on domestic violence disclosures and crime rates in these communities. Preliminary evidence from the U.S. suggests that social cohesion and informal social control mediates the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and intimate-partner homicide (Browning, 2002). Future studies could expand this to examine domestic violence outcomes more broadly.

# CHAPTER 7:

# CONCLUSION

The present study sought to examine key processes in the response to domestic violence in India by attending to the individual, institutional and community levels. The first study examined the response at the individual level in terms of understanding mechanisms that facilitate the empowerment of women. Our study highlights the important role that grassroots agencies can play in facilitating the empowerment of survivors. We found that the agency's model of working with survivors of violence aligns with best practices in the U.S. by being survivor-centered, fostering a collaborative relationship with staff, engaging in systems-level advocacy, and fostering independence of women. We also found that the model remains culturally relevant by supporting efforts to mediate and emphasizing women's connectedness to her community and social support systems.

The second study examined the systems level to understand key mechanisms involved in facilitating perceived institutional change in the response to domestic violence. This study highlights the importance of empowering organizational characteristics, relational capacity, organizational reputation and social capital as being salient for institutional change efforts. Results from this study highlight how efforts to engage in institutional collaborations may be associated with outcomes of increased knowledge about stakeholders about the agency and gender issues, creation of inter-agency networks and referral systems, and community trust in formal systems.

Finally, the third study examined mechanisms that were central for facilitating the shifting of community narratives in the community response to domestic violence. This study

highlighted a model of social change in the response to domestic violence that works on individual and community level change in the hope for broader social change by emphasizing citizen participation, community mobilization and capacity for informal social control. Specifically, at the individual level, this study found that organizational activities that provide opportunities for community participation and leadership and increase individual members' knowledge, skills, and resources appear to be salient in increasing individuals' critical consciousness and empowering them to be agents of social change. Together, these studies provide highlight a successful culturally-based intervention to support survivors of violence while attempting to engage in community and systems-level change.

Maton, Seidman, and Aber (2011) describe the importance of prioritizing voice and qualitative methods in the understanding of empowering processes. Rappaport (1990) also wrote, "research that… seeks to give voice to the people of concern may benefit from data collection and analysis approaches that emphasize the description, multiple perspectives and authentication of those voices that are often ignored" (p. 58). Specifically, given that marginalized individuals are often silenced, privileging their voices and perspectives through the use of qualitative methods is consistent with an empowerment perspective (Maton, Seidman, & Aber, 2011). Thus, a unique strength of this work is in its incorporation of survivors' voices and perspectives on their engagement in help-seeking processes, and their experiences with the specific program under study as well as formal systems more broadly. This study can also inform larger social change efforts given its contextualized understanding of diverse perspectives of individuals from disadvantaged communities, many of whom were situated as change makers within their community.

Additionally, similar to the studies reviewed by Trickett (2011), we see this project as having implications for adding to a larger body of knowledge on empowering and empowered settings by documenting the processes and outcomes related to a specific setting, and also spreading awareness by disseminating information related to the organization. Our use of qualitative inquiry helped to yield rich descriptions of the setting and the processes involved in the facilitation of empowerment of members and social change within the community.

In addition to highlighting critical mechanisms of change that appear to be at play in the agency's work with the community and survivors of violence, this study also situates itself in a unique position by highlighting key ways in which this community-based approach is distinct from dominant approaches in the U.S. For example, the agency's emphasis on de-institutionalizing the response to domestic violence, inculcating capacity for informal social control, creating networks of informal and formal supports for women, and its joint emphasis on individual, systems, and community level change makes its approach distinct and innovate. This study can inform other efforts in a similar cultural context, thus improving services for survivors and communities.

A key contribution of this study is in its highlighting of the importance of social and community change accompanying individual empowerment, such that individual level agency and changes in outcomes can be sustained within a supportive community. Thus, the study's emphasis on understanding a setting both as an empowered and empowering setting situates it in a unique position to contribute to this larger body of literature.

Additionally, this study can inform culturally anchored initiatives to respond to domestic violence by drawing on success stories emerging directly from the communities that need the help and intervention. This bottoms-up approach to identifying successful, culturally anchored

models may be more effective than adapting interventions from other cultural contexts (Yoshikawa & Olazagasti, 2011).

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